PAST MASTERS 256

F. Scott Fitzgerald
Edgar Wallace
J. Jefferson Farjeon
Damon Runyon
Conan Doyle
George Allan England
Bertram Atkey
Henry S. Whitehead

and more

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

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1: The Mutiny

William Harrison Ainsworth

1805-1882

Collected in: *December Tales*, W. H. Ainsworth, 1823

The collection "December Tales" was published when the author was 18 years old. He went on to become a celebrated Victorian novelist..

—O God!
Had you but seen his pale, pale blanched cheek!
He would not eat.— O Christ!
The Beryl.

IN THE SUMMER OF the year 18—, I was the only passenger on board the merchantman *Alceste*, which was bound to the Brazils. One fine moonlight nighty I stood on the deck and gazed on the quiet ocean on which the moonbeams danced. The wind was so stilly that it scarcely agitated the sails which were spread out to invite it. I looked round; it was the same on every side— a world of waters: not a single object diversified the view or intercepted the long and steady glance which I threw over the ocean. I have heard many complain of the sameness and unvarying uniformity of the objects which oppose themselves to the eye of the voyager. I feel differently; I can gaze for hours without weariness on the deep occupied with the thought it produces; I can listen to the rush of the element as the vessel cleaves it and these things have charms for me which others cannot perceive.

I heard on a sudden a noise which seemed to proceed from the captain's cabin, and I thought I could distinguish the voices of several men, speaking earnestly, though in a suppressed tone. I cautiously drew near the spot from whence the noise arose, but the alarm was given, and I could see no one. I retired to rest, or rather to lie down; for I felt that heavy and foreboding sense of evil overpower me, which comes we know not how or wherefore; and I could not sleep, knowing that there had been disputes between the captain and his men, respecting some point of discipline, and I feared to think what might be the consequences. I lay a long time disturbed with these unpleasant reflections; at last, wearied with my thoughts my eyes closed, and I dropped to sleep. But it was not to that refreshing sleep which recruits the exhausted spiiits, and by a while "steeping the senses in forgetfulness" renders them fitter for exertion on awakening. My sleep was haunted with hideous and confused dreams and murder and blood seemed to surround me. I was awakened by convulsive starts and in vain, sought again for quiet slumber; the same images filled my mind,

diversified in a thousand horrid forms. Early in the mornings I arose and went above, and the mild sea breese dispelled my uneasy sensations.

During the whole of the day nothing seemed to justify the fears that had tormented me, and every thing went on in its regular course. The men pursued their occupations quietly and in silence and I thought the temporary fit of disaffection was passed over. Alas! I remembered not that the passions of men like deep waters are most to be suspected when they seem to glide along most smoothly. Night came on, and I retired to rest more composed than on the preceding evening. I endeavoured to convince myself that the noises I had heard were but the fancies of a disturbed imagination, and I slept soundly. Ill-timed security! About midnight I was awakened by a scuffling in the vessel. I hastened to the spot; the captain and one of his officers were fighting against a multitude of the ship's crew. In a moment after I saw the officer fall. Two fellows advanced to me, and, clapping pistols to my breast, threatened instant death if I stirred or spoke. I gazed on the bloody spectacle; the bodies, which lay around, swimming in gore, testified that the mutineers could not have accomplished their aim with impunity. I was horror-struck; a swimming sensation came over my eyes, my limbs fidled me, and I fell senseless.

When I recovered, I found myself lying on a bed. Every thing was still. I listened in vain for a sound; I lay still a considerable time; at last, I arose and walked about the ship, but could see no one. I searched every part of the vessel; I visited the place of slaughter, which I had, at first, carefully avoided; I counted nine dead bodies, and the coagulated blood fonned a loathsome mass around them; I shuddered to think I was desolate— the companion of death.

"Good God !" said I, "and they have left me here alone!" The word sounded like a knell to me. It now occurred to me it was necessary the bodies should be thrown overboard. I took up one of them dragged it to the side and plunged it into the waves; but the dash of the heavy body into the sea, minded me more forcibly of my loneliness. The sea was so calm I could scarcely hear it ripple by the vessel's side. One by one I committed the bodies to their watery grave. At last my horrible task was finished. My next work was to look for the ship's boats, but they were gone, as I expected. I could not bear to remain in the ship; it seemed a vast tomb for me. I resolved to make some sort of raft, and depart in it. This occupied two or three days; at length it was completed, and I succeeded in setting it afloat

I lowered into it all the provision I could find in the ship, which was but little, the sailors having, as I imagined, carried off the remainder. All was ready, and I prepared to depart. I trembled at the thought of the dangers I was about to encounter. I was going to commit myself to the ocean, separated from it only by a few boards, which a wave might scatter over the surface of the waters. I might never arrive at land, or meet with any vessel to rescue me from my danger, and I

would be exposed, without shelter, and almost without food. I half resolved to remain in my present situation; but a moment's reflection dispelled the idea of such a measure. I descended; I stood on my frail raft; I cut the rope by which it was fastened to the ship. I was confused to think of my situation; I could hardly believe that I had dared to enter alone on the waste of waters. I endeavoured to compose myself, but in vain. As far as I could see, nothing presented itself to my view but the vessel I had left; the sea was perfectly stilly for not the least wind was stirring. I endeavoured, with two pieces of board, which supplied the place of oars, to row myself along; but the very little progress I made alarmed me. If the calm should continue, I should perish of hunger. How I longed to see the little sail I had made, agitated by the breeze! I watched it from morning to night; it was my only employment; but in vain. The weather continued the same. Two days passed over; I looked at my store of provisions; it would not, I found, last above three or four days longer at the farthest. They were quickly passed away. I almost gave myself up for lost. I had scarcely a hope of escaping.

On the fourth day since my departure from the ship I thought I perceived something at a distance; I looked at it intently— it was a sail. Good heavens! what were my emotions at the sight! I fastened my handkerchief on a piece of wood and waved it in hopes that it would be observed and that I should be rescued from my fearful condition. The vessel pressed on its course; I shouted;— I knew they could not hear me but despair impelled me to try so useless an expedient. It passed on— it grew dim— I stretched my eyeballs to see it— it vanished— it was gone! I will not attempt to describe the torturing feelings which possessed me at seeing the chance of relief which had offered itself destroyed. I was stupefied with grief and disappointment. My stock of provisions was now entirely exhausted, and I looked forward with horror to an excruciating death.

A little water which had remained, quenched my burning thirst. I wished that the waves would rush over me. My hunger soon became dreadful, but I had no means of relieving it. I endeavoured to sleep, that I might, for a while, forget my torments; and my wearied frame yielded for a while to slumber. When I awoke I was not, however, refreshed; I was weak, and felt a burning pain at my stomach. I became hourly more feeble; I lay down, but was unable to rise again. My limbs lost their strength; my lips and tongue were parched; a convulsive shuddering agitated me; my eyes seemed darkened, and I gasped for breath.

The burning at my stomach now departed; I experienced no pain; but a dull torpor came over me; my hands and feet became cold; I believed I was dying, and I rejoiced at the thought. Presently I lost all thought and feeling, and lay, without sense, on a few boards, which divided me from the ocean. In this situation, as I was afterwards informed, I was taken up by a small vessel, and carried to a seaport town. I slowly recovered, and find that I alone, of all who

were on board the vessel in which I had embarked had escaped death. The crew who had departed in the boats after murdering the captain had met their reward— the boats were shattered against a rock.

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2: Simpson and Delilah

Louis Arthur Cunningham

1901-1954

MacLean's, 15 February 1931

"DID I EVER HEAR o' mariners comin' back to life after bein' thought dead— did I?" Captain Jonas Hallan leaned forward, glared at his questioner for a moment, then laughed derisively and sank back against the leather cushions of the best chair in the Pilot Rooms. "Listen, me lad, an' I'll tell ye a story that'll make this here Enoch Harding an' Robertson Crusoe, either one o' them, look like a jackass barkentine alongside a China clipper. Ever hear o' Simpson an' Delilah?"

"You mean Sampson, Captain," gently corrected young Larkin, mate of the *Lady Rodney*, who had been fool enough to start Captain Hallan on one of his interminable yarns. "Sampson, a Biblical character, noted for his great strength."

Captain Hallan made a neat bull's-eye through the gleaming maw of the brass cuspidor, and licked his lips. He transfixed Bob Larkin with an eye as mean and glittering as that of the Ancient Mariner.

SON, (said he) I say Simpson an' I mean Simpson. I know the Bible better'n you do. This man I'm speakin' of was named Percy Simpson; he were second mate on a brig sailin' out o' this port, an' as harmless an' mild a feller as you'd meet in a dozen v'yages round the world. And, as is often the case with mild-mannered men, he were married to the sharpest-tongued battle-ax of a woman that ever skinned her elbow leanin' on a back fence to harangue the next-door neighbors. Percy Simpson was a happy man at sea, but once he set foot ashore in town here, there wasn't a dog led a life worse'n him. Her name was Delilah; his, as I've been tryin' to tell ye, was Percy Simpson.

This brig he were second mate of was named the *Blanche K. Lister*— an old tub if ever there was one. Only a miracle kept her afloat, no company would underwrite her, an' the only reason Percy Simpson stuck to her was because he hoped she'd founder some fine day an' then he wouldn't have to come home to Delilah's infernal tongue-lashin's an' hair-pullin's. Aye, a quiet rating, down deep in Davy Jones' locker, would 'a' been better for Percy than havin' to live with this awful female who was his duly wedded wife, who he'd taken in in one o' his weaker moments when rum got the better of 'im.

Anyways, Percy sailed down the Bay o' Fundy one fine day on the *Blanche K. Lister*. He'd been a month in port, and in all that time he'd suffered misery beyond all namin'. If he stayed in the house Delilah's tongue never stopped

waggin'. She fancied that Percy, when he were in furrin' ports in the course of his v'yages, got drunk an' went around with other weemen an' the like. There never was anything farther from the truth, for Percy were just as scaredlike an' quiet in Singapore or Port Said as he would be in his own kitchen with her standin' over him. He were an' awful fool, I'll admit; since he got blamed for everything anyway an' got called all kinds of a blaggard, he might as well have merited it. But not Percy.

He was a happy man when the *Blanche K. Lister* weighed anchor an' hoisted her rotten canvas for a v'yage around the Horn to Valparaiso. He'd be away for months an' months: maybe a good gale o' wind would put a finish to the old brig, or maybe a drunken seaman would drop a belayin' pin on him from up aloft an' split his skull. These were happy prospects for Percy Simpson, just as they'd be for you, me lad, if you was wed to a chin-waggin' hag like Delilah.

Well, sir, to get on with this yarn, Percy's wishes was soon granted. Oh, she rounded the Horn all right, after beatin' her way down a stormy Easting— she rounded the Horn an' then one night she shoves her nose slap into a sunken ledge an', with a high sea runnin' and it blowin' a gale o' wind at the time, she soon gets battered to pieces. They la'nched the boats, an' the captain thought he'd got everybody safe away from her, but when dawn comes Percy Simpson is nowheres to be found. They cruise around a bit, but never see sight nor sign of him.

WORD COMES to Saint John in the coorse o' time that the *Blanche K. Lister* had been wrecked: an' everyone said, "About time that old scow got sunk." An' when they heard about Percy Simpson goin' down with her they said, "Poor Perce, he's better off." Delilah, she sheds a bucketful o' crocodile tears, gets her duds dyed black an' dons the widder's weeds, an' lets it be known that, despite the fact o' Percy bein' a brute to her an' gettin' drunk in furrin' parts an' runnin' around with dockside hussies, she loved him an' would never cease to love him— no, sir. But presently she gets a bit of a legacy from Percy's savin's, an' sets herself up in a snug little bar down in Drury Lane, where the bedbugs ate the man.

Now that, ye might say, sounds like the end o' the story. The curtain seems to fall. Here's Percy dead an' at peace, an' Delilah dishin' out the grog to the seamen an' shipworkers who drop in at the Widder Simpson's for a drop to warm themselves. Everyone speaks kind-like about Percy, an' the widder sheds a few tears, dries her eyes with the corner of her apron, an' sighs an' says, "Yes, I miss 'im somethin' terrible. A lone woman has a hard time of it in this world. She needs a strong man, such as Percy were, to be her defense an' safeguard." But the bloom's come back to her cheek, whether from the extra drop she takes or

not, I couldn't say; an' she simpers an' giggles like a schoolgirl when a fine strappin' mariner strolls in and rings his money on the bar.

An' Percy has been given up for dead, o' coorse. Five years go by, eight years, ten, an' Percy Simpson is pretty well forgotten. The widder gets more rosy-cheeked an' plump, an' she has a few suitors, mostly simple-minded seamen an' old codgers clever enough to think about featherin' their nest by marryin' her an' helpin' to tend bar but not with sense enough to recall poor Percy Simpson an' how death were a kind release to him, far better'n bein' married to her.

At this time, ten years after the loss o' the *Blanche K. Lister*, I'm sailin' as mate aboard the *Star of Egypt*, Liverpool owned an' plyin' between Canada an' the Old Country. A Bluenose ship she were, with Hurricane Jack Magee for master an' a crew o' Downeasters as hard as iron, with brine runnin' in their veins instead o' blood.

We finished dischargin' a cargo of deals at Liverpool, an' were goin' home in ballast to load again. A couple of Dutchmen, ordinary seamen aboard the *Star*, got into a brawl with some Liverpool Irishmen an' were soon occupyin' comfortable berths in the hospital. Hurricane Jack had bit of a reputation, if you'll remember, an' seamen was a mite shy of signin' on with him.

Anyways, Hurricane Jack he goes to a crimp there in Liverpool this afternoon, an' says to get him a couple of men an' have them aboard afore midnight when the *Star of Egypt* is due to up-anchor an' away. Hurricane Jack tells me to go along with this crimp, whose name is Bull Haney, an' see that Bull don't wish any deef mutes or Rooshian Finns or cripples on us. It's been done afore, ye know— seamen put aboard a vessel unconscious, an' when they wake up they ain't seamen a-tall but shop clerks or the like.

"He won't play any tricks on me," I promises Hurricane. "I'll see what we're gettin', sir, never fear."

I take meself off to Bull Haney's crimping joint, which is an old shack down by the docks with a bar on the ground floor an' sailors' boardin'-house, so called, aloft. There's plenty o' men there, an' very few that wouldn't cut your throat for a smooth sixpence. The place is filled with smoke an' profanity, and you'd think these fellers was bein' paid double wages to drink the world dry, the way they're swillin' the rum into 'em. Some weemen there too, but the less said o' them the better.

I find Bull Haney in the back room. A big, blubbery scoundrel, with his eyes so far lost in his fat head that ye could scarce tell whether he were sleepin' or wakin'. An' he speaks in a little whisper of a voice that makes me think someone must be listenin', until it dawns on me it's the way he has to talk, due to him havin' his throat eat up by whisky or bronical asthma or somethin'.

"I got me eye on your men, sir," he wheezes, while I'm still wonderin' if he can see me with those invisible eyes of his. "I got 'em seelected, an' now it's just a matter o' knockin' 'em on the head an' slingin' 'em aboard your vessel. Come along of me now."

We walks to the back door, an' there's a covered wagon, like a Black Maria, waitin' there. I gets in, an' Bull clambers up after me, an' the wagon begins to creak an' list away over to starboard with the weight o' the big lubber— twenty stone if he were a ounce.

Bull, he clucks to the horse, the worst lookin' old hunk of crowbait as ever was held on his feet by a pair of shafts, an' the beast staggers forward, an' the wagon, with me and Bull aboard, pushes him along the street.

"I got me men to lure 'em out," wheezes Bull. "Lure 'em out, d'ye see, sir? Then— why, then, it's just a little tap on the skull— ha-ha!" He gives me a poke with his elbow in the ribs, an' I gives him a better one, resentin' this familiarity. He goes "pop," like a balloon, an' I think maybe I've bust him. But, no, sir, he comes to, an' we rumble down one dark street an' up another.

"Ah," whispers Bull. "There's one o' them now."

I haven't time to look hard before someone is heaved into the rear o' the wagon, an' Bull drives off. After a few minutes Bull says:

"Ah, there's the other one."

I get a look at this lad. He's standin' near a street light an' I note he has a black beard, an' I recalled seein' him in the bar. He's feelin' pretty good now, an' he's leanin' again' the lamp-post an' singin':

"Oh, I spent all me tin
Wi' the lasses, drinkin' gin,
An' across the briny ocean I must wander—"

He never said or sang a truer word than that. Just then Bull's retainers snuk up on him an' one clipped him on the jaw with a fist decked out with knuckle-dusters. The other picks him up, an' they cart him over an' dump him in the wagon.

When we get to the dock, there's a little matter o' papers an' finance. I make an inspection of the new additions to our crew, find them sound enough seemingly, and have them slung aboard in bowlines from one o' the *Star's* boats, which rowed us out to the mooring buoy where she lay, all ready to put to sea.

WHEN THE CREW is mustered aft next mornin' ye never see a sorrier sight than the man with the black beard. A seaman, when shanghaied, usually takes it philosophical enough, but this one's eye is wild, and, what with his flowin' beard

an' all, he looks like one o' them profits ye see now an' again' on church windows.

"What's your name?" says I.

"Don't matter, sir," says he. "I'll answer to anything. Ye can call me Abel Brown, which is the name I go by."

I see he's not meanin' to be impertinent, so I merely nods an' looks keenly at 'im. He's pretty much agitated, an' he comes to me presently an' says:

"Are we really bound for Saint John, sir?"

I tells him we are indeed, an' he seems to stagger as if a terrible blow's been dealt him. Then he tugs at his beard an' seems to find some consolation in that. He falls to work, an' proves himself a first-rate seaman. But he never bothers with anybody in the fo'c'sle nor utters a word he doesn't need to. A bit of a mystery, he is, but his mates leave him pretty well alone, thinkin' him a bit cracked in the head.

The bos'n, however, takes a shine to 'im. The bos'n was Paddy Marney, a little wizened-up man with a raggedy mustache an' the finest stock o' profanity I ever did hear, bar none. Whatever he sees in Abel Brown is more than anyone can tell, but he cultivates Abel, gives him baccy, quizzes him, an' generally h'ants the life outen him.

We talked about it on the quarter-deck, an' Hurricane Jack says to me one day:

"Jonas, why is the bos'n forever taggin' around after Abel Brown there? Ye better find out about it. I don't think Brown's right in his head, an' I'm darn' sure the bos'n is no rock o' sense. Ain't he tryin' to marry the Widder Simpson who keeps the bar over in Drury Lane?"

"He is, sir," I says. "Which proves he's crazy. I'll see what I can find out about all this."

Next day I corners Paddy Marney an' says to him:

"What's all this about, you an' Abel Brown bein' such friends? Ye never were very sociable with anyone else."

The bos'n looks confused, chews hard on his baccy, an' squints up at me for a moment afore he answers. Then in a hoarse whisper that reminds me o' Bull Haney, he says:

"Mr. Hallan, sir. I'm a man in love."

"Ye're a bloody old weasel an' a fool into the bargain," I tells him. "An' what's that got to do with Abel Brown?"

"Well, sir," says the bos'n. "I'm nowt but a plain ordinary seafarin' man, an' the words I know is mostly swear words. This, I'm hopin', is me last v'yage. I'm gettin' old now, an' want to settle down in snug harbor. Don't ye see, sir, I'm in love with a deevine creetcher, an' I haven't gumption enough or refinement, so ye might say, or knowledge of how to put what I want to say in words. An' who

else could I get to do it that wouldn't make a botch of it, or try to put in a word for themselves, or somethin' else. But Abel Brown is the man for that little job. He's not a marryin' man, he tells me. He reads books— I've seen 'im— an' he talks as smooth as a shipowner, sir."

"I see," says I. "An' what does Abel himself think o' this here proposition?"

"He ain't so eager, sir, which is why I have to keep after him so. I feel he's me one hope. I'd be tongue-tied meself; but not him. I think maybe he'll give in after we make port. D'ye know what I think about him, sir?" He peers around the corner o' the galley very cautiouslike, then winks at me very knowin'. "I think he ain't what he pretends to be. I think, sir, he's a lord or somethin' in-cog-night-oh— that's what he is."

Lookin' at Abel Brown, ye might readily believe there was some truth in it, for he was what ye'd call a distinguished-lookin' man. However, I tells the bos'n that men grow beards very often to hide the fact they have no chin. But that doesn't impress him at all, an' he continues to dance attendance on Abel Brown for the rest o' the v'yage.

Finally the bos'n calls me in to help plead his cause, an' the two of us gets to haranguin' Abel, who just tugs at that thick beard o' his an' looks like the Grand Dook of Rooshia.

"I don't know," says he. "I don't know, sir. I don't know, bos'n. I tell ye I'm no hand at this sort o' thing. I don't like weemen— never did."

"Ye should help a shipmate," I tells him sternly. "The bos'n here's been kind to ye, an' the least ye could do is act as his ambassador an' say for him what he can't say himself."

"All right then," says Abel Brown desperatelike, "I'll do it! Who is this woman, bos'n?"

"Oh," says Paddy, "ye wouldn't know 'er, Abel. She's a widder, Delilah Simpson, an' she keeps a bar in Drury Lane."

Abel Brown stands transfixed. He looks like part of a waxwork show— Man With Beard Hit by Ax— just like that. Then, after a moment, he comes to life an' looks like a wild man all around him, as if seekin' a means of escape; but there's only the sea, wild an' grey, reachin' for miles into the dim greyness of sky. And Abel Brown comes to himself with a sigh an' says:

"I'll do me very best for ye, bos'n, an' I'm prayin' to God from now on— prayin' as I never did afore— that you'll get the Widder Simpson."

WELL, SIR, we reach port, and presently the bos'n an Abel Brown goes ashore, after gettin' all dressed up in their Sunday-go-to-meetin's, the bos'n in his own an' Abel Brown in the cook's good blue suit an' silk muffler. I'll tell ye, Mister, Abel, dressed up like that, did look somethin' grand, an' the bos'n appeared like a old wrinkled monkey beside him. I read a pome since then about

Miles Standish, who was a feller as got another to plead his case with the girl of his choice, just as the bos'n was gettin' Abel Brown to propose for him. An', though the pome wasn't written at that time, I says to meself, "Bos'n, you're makin' a big mistake."

The bos'n, however, is feelin' pretty good. They drop into the first bar, which is Sharky Dan's, an' put away a glass or two of grog. Then at all the other saloons along the way they stop an' have a few, till by the time they reach Drury Lane they're feelin' brave an' happy an' singin' a deep-sea chantey, so full o' spirits are they. An' Abel Brown says to the bos'n:

"Bos'n," says he, "if you get the Widder Simpson you'll be the happiest man on earth."

"Aye," says the bos'n. "That I will."

"So will I," says Abel.

The Widder Simpson is sittin' in her snug little bar— a fine, strappin' figure of a woman. Her cheeks get rosier still when she sees the bos'n, who hung around there a lot on previous v'yages, and she bows an' curtsies very sweet to Abel Brown. The bos'n has a room above the shop, where the Widder Simpson keeps lodgers, an' now he says he'll just take a run up to his room. An' with that, he gives Abel a nudge and a wink, and whispers that this is the time.

Abel leans on the bar and strokes his fine black beard with nervous hand. The widder looks very coy, an' says she hopes they had a pleasant v'yage, an' it's good to see them comin' home, an' the world is a hard an' lonely place for widders.

"Not for a right pretty an' youthful one like you, surely," says Abel Brown. "Hardly, for a fine figger of a woman like you, Mrs. Simpson. Sure, not a man in all the world but would be proud to take your late lamented husband's place."

"A fine man," said the widder. "There'll never be another like 'im. I loved him, an' he loved me more'n words can tell. It must 'a' been horrible for him to die away off there, an' I can always imagine him callin' for me with his dyin' breath an'—"

She began to weep, an' Abel handed her the cook's blue silk muffler an' consoled her as best he could.

"I'm thinkin' ye won't be lonesome much longer, Mrs. Simpson," says he. "There's a fine an' handsome an' generous man will have somethin' to say to you after a while. He'll make ye happy, I know."

"Oh, Mr. Brown!" says the widder. And if the bar hadn't been between 'em, she'd 'a' leaned on Abel's chest.

Abel he goes upstairs in a hurry an' tells the bos'n that now's his time, that he's paved the way an' the widder's in a receptive an' mellow mood. Abel himself is shakin' from the ordeal, an' he turns to the bottle of rum with which the bos'n has been fortifyin' himself an' drinks mightily. Then, what with the

excitement an' all he's drunk, he wishes the bos'n the best of luck an' falls down on the bed an' goes to sleep.

The bos'n, all smiles, goes downstairs into the bar, prepared to conquer, confident that the widder an' her comfortable bar an' all will henceforth sail under the house flag of the Marneys. Yes, he figures from what Abel said that she's about ready to melt into his arms. He finds her still sittin' there, lookin' very sweet an' mild an' happy.

"Well, Delilah," says he. "Are ye all ready now to become Mrs. Paddy Marney?"

She jumps up like a tornado an' races around the bar.

"What!" says she. "Ye little ould weasel. Is it me you're askin' to marry ye? I'll see ye further first. Sure, I'm goin' to marry one o' the handsomest, finest, strongest men in the world. I always said if ever I married again, 'twould be a man with a beard, not a freak like you with hog bristles on your face."

"What! What!" says the bos'n. "Didn't Abel tell ye I wanted—?"

"He never mentioned your name," says she.

THE BOS'N staggers outen the bar. He's feelin' like a madman. He mutters things about traitors an' beards an' Judases, an' he hoofs it upstairs an' into his room. He stares for a moment with horrible venom at Abel Brown, digs into his bag, an' fetches out a pair of scissors an' his razor. Then, quietly, he sits down by the sleepin' Abel an' falls to work.

Now, the bos'n never saw or knew Delilah Simpson's first husband, consequently he never realizes that the face— thin and small-chinned an' with a blue mark by the left lip corner— that comes out from behind the lopped-off shrubbery is the face of none other than Percy Simpson! He didn't know the awful deed he was doin'. He finishes the dirty work while his victim groans an' tosses in his sleep. He finishes the work, picks up his things, an' goes downstairs.

"I'm leavin'," says he. "I'm goin' for good, Mrs. Simpson. An' I hopes ye'll be very happy with yer fine handsome man with a beard. Ye'd better go up an' see to him— he ain't feelin' so good."

With that he leaves the shop, an' the widder, after a moment of shy hesitation, goes quietly upstairs an' taps at the door. The sleeper has just woke up, an' he calls for her to come in. She pushes the door open, smilin' an' gigglin'.

"Here I am, Mr. Brown," she begins. "That little wretch said—"

She stopped in her tracks, an' her mouth hung open an' her eyes popped from her head. For there in front of her is poor Percy, thin-faced and frightened, all his fine looks an' distinction gone with his beard.

"You!" she hollers. "You! Where you been this ten years, you hidden sneak? Drinkin' an' traipsin' around furrin parts with all kinds o' hussies, an' me here

wearin' my fingers to the bone an' at the mercy of every insultin' wretch who comes in—"

Percy just groans as the words flow out of her in a torrent and she advances upon him ready to use her fists. He just closes his eyes an' dreams of that quiet Island in the South Pacific where, after being washed ashore from the wreck of the *Blanche K. Lister*, he'd spent the happiest years of his life.

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3: The Return

Alice C. Tomholt

1887-1949

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 1 Jan 1916

A prolific Australian writer of short stories, mostly for the newspaper. This is a story on the home front in World War 1.

NELL WOKE WITH the morning sun streaming through the wide-open window on to her unbeautiful, brown-skinned face.

For a moment she lay, luxuriously lazy; then suddenly sat straight up in the narrow bed, her eyes, big and brown and tender, and her sole claim to anything approaching physical beauty, glittering joyously into wide awakeness.

Why, this was the day— the day!

She scrambled out of bed, flung her pink kimono about her spare, shapeless figure, and darted like an elf of woodland up the hall of the neat and well-built little villa which Jeff had tought and furnished for Carina and himself, before the ominous war-cloud had broken, and upset all arrangements for the wedding, because Jeff had refused to stuff his ears to the stertorious call of duty and honor, and because Carina, inwardly piqued in her narrow, mean soul at his placing his country before her adorable self, had stubbornly and sullenly declined to marry him before his departure, tho' assenting readily enough to his suggestion that Nell and she should give up their rooms, and take up their residence in the new house until his return.

Tempestuously Nell flung open the door of the best bedroom.

"Carina!" she cried. "The day's come at last— the day Jeff—"

But she got no further. Her voice died away in her throat— breathlessly. She stood perfectly still, her hand on the knob of the door, staring.

Carina, beautiful with the beauty of pale gold hair, slumberous gray eyes, petulant, scarlet-lipped mouth, and complexion that was as cream and roses when compared with Nell's, was not in the big, handsome bed. It was perfectly smooth and unruffled in its rather elaborate display of lace bedspread and pillow-shams over satin of palest blue.

But on it lay, carelessly flung, an open sheet of paper, closely scrawled over In Carina's big, flourishy writing.

A dull foreboding of ill swept coldly over Nell as she looked at it. Half numbed, she went forward, and picked it up.

"It's no use," (she read) "I simply can't go on with it, Nell! You're such a quixotic little goat, that of course you'll think me all kinds of a sinner; but I simply couldn't marry— a blind man. Ugh! the very thought of it makes me shudder. It sounds heartless, I know; but surely Jeff will understand, If you don't. I didn't believe it at first, that rumor about his being blind; but when

the letters came, all jagged and sprawly, as if written in the dark, or guided by another hand, I seemed to realise that it was true. And then when he wrote about his being invalided home, and asking us not to go and meet him, but to wait for him at the house, I knew, of course, that he was sensitive about his blindness, and did not want to meet us for the first time in public. I never had much imagination, but I could read all that between the lines of his letter, and I was scared, just dead scared, Nell, of his perhaps expecting me to keep to my promise. I have always been a coward. It was always you who came to the fore when pluck was needed. I want you to come now, or, rather, when Jeff comes home. Tell him that Harry Raynor and I were married this afternoon. He has been offered a position in Brisbane, and has taken it for my sake, because I want I to keep away from Melbourne for a while— until Jeff gets over this a bit. We are catching the boat that sails for Brisbane just about the time that Jeff's boat is due; and, of course, it would be quite useless, now, for you to try to see me before I go. It would be rather uncomfortable for all concerned, and I detest scenes. As for the house, of course, it is all Jeff's now. He might find some quixotic kind of a person who would be content to share it with him. Besides, he'll want someone to look after him, being blind—"

There was more; but Nell had read enough. A harsh sob broke in her throat. Her dark face whitened with a passionate anger. She crushed the thin sheet of scented paper into a ball, and flung it far from her, like a loathsome thing. And her voice fell harshly, brokenly, across the silence of the room:—

"You're my sister, but I hate you— hate you! If he had come back all maimed and broken, as well as blind, I would have loved him— as I always loved him. And you— you've given me the task of breaking his heart!"

Her little brown face grew pale and strained with the tension of the follow ing long hours of waiting— waiting. But, about 4 o'clock that afternoon, she heard a car draw up noisily befora the front of the house, and many cheery men-voices bidding a comrade "Good-bye" and "Good luck!" But she could not move for a while from the big chair in the sitting-room, where she seemed to have been waiting for days, and days. Someone, she knew, would see him safely to the door. She would meet him there, away from the curious friendly eyes of the comrades who had wished him "Good luck!"

She could not speak when at last she opened the door in response to his impatient ring. She just stood looking up into the lean, tan face with its dark, disfiguring glasses. But he seemed to know it was she— not Carina.

"Hallo, little brown rose, he said, holding out his hand— his left hand.

And the next instant her quick eyes had seen the empty right sleeve.

"Jeff!" she gasped, unsteadily. "Jeff!" And, still holding the hand he had outstretched, led him down the hall to the little sitting-room that had been furnished for Carina and himself.

She wondered, vaguely, that he had not kissed her, as he had so often did in his cheery, big-brother way. Yet, somehow, she was relieved. His last big good-bye kiss had, all unknown to him, made a woman out of the little brown mouse.

"Where's Carina?" He asked the in evitable question when they had reached the sitting-room, and Nell had seated herself beside him on the padded couch.

She steadied her voice with an ertort that almost robbed her of heir breath.

"She left for Brisbane by boat— today." He seemed to stare at her agonised face from behind the dark glasses.

"But she knew our boat was arriving this afternoon?"

"Yes," said Nell; "she knew."

"Then, why did she go today, of all days?"

"Because— she was ashamed to— face you, Jeff."

"Ashamed?" he gasped. "What, in the name of Heaven, do you mean, Nell?"

She smothered a sob. Why, why had Carina left her this task? She laid her hand on his arm, and braced herself desperately.

"Jeff, she was married, to Harry Raynor yesterday afternoon. She left a note last night, after I had gone to bed, asking me to tell you. I— I found it this morning."

After the first swift start he sat quite motionless, the knuckles of his left hand whitening about his knee.

Her sensitive nerves strung up to their highest pitch, she felt that she wanted to sob out aloud in the tense silence which followed; but she smothered the Impulse passionately. After all, he was a soldier, and soldiers were strong to suffer.

"Harry Raynor," he muttered presently. "But why? Why? I thought she cared."

Nell laid her small, brown hand over the big, clenched one. Her eyes looked very beautiful just then in their tenderness and pity.

"She did care," she said softly, "as much as she was capable of caring. But she was a coward, Jeff. When she heard about your eyes she— Oh, can't you understand?" she broke out, suddenly and passionately.

"My eyes?" he muttered, dazed.

"Yes," she paid desperately. "She said she could not marry a— blind man. It was fear of your not coming back— whole— that made her afraid to marly you before you went— fear of your coming back maimed or— blind."

Slowly a vivid understanding of things crept over his lean face.

"Jeff," she whispered, "you know how sorry I am, now I would have prevented it if I could—"

His hand unclenched, moved, squeezed hers, then freed it. But he did not speak. He stood up, and walked a little unsteadily toward the open window, where a green-painted box of flowering mignonette was exhaling breath, pieroing and sweet."

Tears welled up in Nell's eyes, flowed over and down her thin little cheeks as she watched him. She pressed her face close against the padded back of the

couch to smother the sobs that were battling for escape. And presently she felt a hand pass over her head, felt an arm draw her close against the shelter of a khaki coat.

"Don't cry about It, little brown mouse," he said; "it's not worth a tear. Why did it hurt you so much to tell me?"

"Because I knew how it would— break your heart!" she sobbed from the depths of the khaki coat.

"Break my heart!" He laughed, and she looked up quickly, wondering at the lightness of his tone. Dimly through the dark glasses his eyes seemed to smile down into hers. "It hasn't broken my heart," he added, "It's given me— a way out."

"A way out?" she stammered helplessly, sitting up and dabbing at her wet eyes. "What do you mean?"

His arm tightened about her.

"Listen, little elf-woman," he said quietly. "My love for Carina, if it ever was love, died out, somehow, when she cut up so rough about my leaving her to help the boys over In Gallipoli. But I intended to go on with things if I ever came back. I was not going to back out of my engagement to Carina beoause I had been a fool and not looked deep. But her letters, the ones she sent me over there, hurt like the very devil. They were such poor solace for a chap who was down some times in the depths of hell. They were so empty, so entirely without feeling, for all their endearing expressions. But I got letters from someone else that seemed to transform trench or dugout into Paradise while I was reading them, and every time I thought of them, they helped. God! how they helped a chap in the playing of the devil's own war game; and they revealed their writer to me in a won derful way, a way in which I ant sure . sne had not the slightest intention of revealing herself. I seemed to be looking through the carefully closed door of a woman's soul, while I was reading those letters with their something suppressed, yet not suppressed, in them. They made me glad to be I alive; glad that I hadn't fallen as so many of the other poor chaps had done. But they hurt, too, because I loved their writer, and—I was bound to Carina."

"But now you are free." Nell's voice came a little unsteadily. "I am glad, I Jeff, glad. She will not mind things? She will not be— afraid?"

"No," he said, quietly; "I don't think she will be afraid. I think she is true blue all through. But I may have made a mistake about her letters. It may have been just wonderful, overflowing sympathy that I mistook for— the other. But, God! Nell, I hope it wasn't."

Something that leaped into his lean, tanned face, something in the way his arm tightened suddenly about her, made her breath hurry in her throat.

"Jeff," she whispered, "you don't, no— you can't mean— my letters?"

"But I do," he said, slowly. "Have I made a mistake, Nell?"

"No, no!" she exclaimed, half-sobbing. "But I thought I hid it all so carefully from you. I— I am such a funny little brown thing. I— I didn't think—"

"That anyone would ever find the true blue beneath the brown?" He kissed her hair, and then her mouth. "We'll sell up this house and buy another, If you are not afraid of a one-armed husband. You're not, are you, Nell?"

"No," she whispered, joyously; "I'll be proud, terribly proud, of him. But—the other, Jeff? It just breaks my heart when I think of your eyes."

"Why, there's no reason to worry about them!" he declared, laughing. "I have to wear these hideous glasses for a while on account of sundry nerves that have been shattered a trifle through coming into too close a contact with an exploding shell. They'll get all right in no time."

She stared at him.

"But your writing! When we heard all the rumors about your sight, and—saw your letters, they seemed to confirm—"

He laughed and held her tighter.

"You try to write with your left hand, and see what a holy mess you make of things before you get a bit of practicel"

A joyous relief swept over her face. Timidly, tenderly, she touched his empty right sleeve.

"But why didn't you tell us," she said.

"I tried to, several times," he confessed; "but I thought you might worry over it, and that it wouldn't come nearly so hard if you just saw— an empty, sleeve. Now, do you understand, little brown mouse?"

She smiled and snuggled closer.

4: The Uses of Adversity

Alice C. Tomholt

The Weekly Times (Melbourne) 1 March 1924

Sweet are the uses of adversity;
which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head."
—Shakespeare.

FOR MONTHS PAST Philip Graham's face had worn a strained and haggard expression; and today, driving in his car from his office to his home, his mouth was set and his eyes heavy with a deep regret at having so soon to blight what little pleasure Letty might have got out of her homecoming.

It was hard on her— deucedly hard. She had become so accustomed to the luxury and easy comfort that had come to her with the growth of his success in the building and architectural world— even though that success had not brought a very brilliant happiness in its train.

Pressure of business had caused him to drift away from her a good deal; and she had at first grown wistful then rebellious at "the silly old work that had stopped all their nice times together," and, at last, resigned, after a series of arguments and petty differences that had increased in recurrence with alarming rapidity.

She had learned gradually then to allow him to swamp himself in his business without any reproaches to impede him; and had swamped her own disappointed self in a whirl of social gaieties to which she had free access as one of the most popular young matrons of her set.

But the not quite so smart people who had known her in the early days of her marriage, when Phil was only beginning to place his feet on the ladder of success, said that her nature seemed to be spoiling; and they looked with regret at the rather too firm set of her pretty mouth, and the hard expression that so often dimmed the softness of her eyes. They did not know that this firmness and hardness was just the weapons with which Letty was learning to fight her apparently futile longing for a return of the old happy comradeship between Phil and herself.

But Graham, deep in the problems and perplexities of his business, did not have time to think much of such things. He was most generous to Letty in money matters; and he was proud of the position that she had been able to take with such ease and charm in the social world, to which his success had given her entry. For many years now she had reigned as a charming young hostess at Oakwood, the big modern home that Graham had built on one of the choicest

sites in Toorak; and he had believed her to be thoroughly happy— except on those occasions when differences had arisen between them.

Then came the time when she grew strangely quiet and listless, and seemed to suddenly tire of the gaiety in which she had so long swamped herself. One of her sisters had married, and had gone with her mine manager husband to live in Queensland; and Graham had made no demur when Letty expressed a desire to go to this favorite sister for six months. It was scarcely worthwhile going such a long way for a shorter visit, she had said, and, after making arrangements for Molly Bryant, a widowed sister of his own, to take her place at Oakwood during her absence, he had let her go, honestly believing the trip would do her good.

Their frequent arguments had become rather wearing to his nerves; and, having several important building contracts on his and his partner's hands, he had seen her off at the station with a vague feeling of relief.

But, with her going, his luck seemed to go also. Almost everything began to go against him in a persistently irritating way; and the climax was reached when his partner cleverly succeeded in absconding with nearly all the firm's available funds, leaving Graham to face the inevitable chaos which followed.

In order to fulfil his contracts, he had to make arrangements for the sale of Oakwood and several other properties in which he had invested his money; and on this day of Letty's homecoming from her six months' visit, he was scarcely any higher in the financial world than he had been when he married her.

He had given her no idea of the trouble that had befallen him, and had forwarded her usual generous allowance regularly, determined that her holiday should not be spoilt, and to do all in his power to prevent the news of the disaster reaching her ears before she returned to her home.

It was with a deep relief that he had read her request that he should not bother to meet her at the station. She wrote that she quite understood how it would interfere with his work, and that she would be quite willing to await his return to Oakwood in the afternoon. Molly would meet her and that would make everything quite all right.

She had once been so foolishly sentimental about meetings and partings between them, and during the first years of their married life, that foolishness had seemed to Graham to be just part of the charm and delicacy of her extremely sensitive nature. Returning to her today after her long absence, a remembrance of her hardened eyes came up before him in striking contrast to the Letty she once had been. And a sudden isolation and regret tugged his heart. This new Letty would not take kindly to the change in their fortunes, she had grown so much like the other young matrons of her set – gay, pleasure-loving; a little cynical and blase.

Graham had this day a sudden longing for the old Letty— the Letty who used to perch – in complete happines and confidence on his knee in one of the big

shabby chairs at Hollybush, their first little home; the Letty who would kiss the tip of his rather blunt nose and tell him not to worry his old black head about any trouble that happened along to depress him. What did anything matter so long as they had their great big love for one another? And he had always been able then to grin cheerfully and battle on.

Molly, knowing of the state of his affairs and the necessity for Letty's speedy knowledge of it, had tactfully accepted a dinner invitation for that evening; so that there was only Letty to greet Graham when he ran his car into the garage and went into the house. Molly had made the big lounge into a bower of beauty with pink and mauve stocks and sweet peas out of the garden, and it was there that Graham found his wife— a wife grown subtly different to the one he had known during recent years; a wife with softened eyes and softened, slightly tremulous mouth, who came toward him a little wist fully. A low cry escaped her as he stepped out of the gloom near the doorway into the full light that fell from one of the big windows. Impulsively she took his face within her two hands— one of the old endearing ways that had frequently given quiet joy to him during the first years of their marriage.

"Phil," she exclaimed with quick solicitude, "what is it? Have you been ill? You look strange, so different, hasn't Molly been looking after you, or"— a little of the old hardness came across her face— "is it business?" She had grown to hate that last word, and she said it now unwillingly.

He forced a grin that did all it could to appear cheerful. Poor little beggar! But the sooner it was over, the better. The sale of Oakwood was to take place in less than a week now; and there would be many things that she would want to arrange. She had never been a coward or a weakling. Dinner would not be served for another hour, at least. It was better for her to know, he assured himself, and there would be a certain relief in confiding in her after so many months of complete holding back of the news of his troubles.

"Yes, there's a lot to tell you, Letty," he said rather abruptly, after he had kissed her. "But come outside for a while. This room is stifling with all these flowers."

Her face looked pale and puzzled as she followed him out into the big garden, where well-tended spring flowers were all riotously abloom amongst shrubs and trees whose shadows were lengthening slowly across the lawn. Graham walked with his two hands clenched behind his back, his fighting chin set, his eyes dark and grim in the lean tan of his face. How he hated it all! What a detestable thing it was to have let her rise so high only to send her down again to a level very little higher than it had been when she had married him. Yet, he convinced himself again, she was no coward. And he told her.

They had seated themselves on a rustic seat that had been built around the fat trunk of an immense flowering pittosporum that had been on the land when

it was bought. The tree was in full bloom, and the scent of its creamy flowers seemed to grow sweeter and heavier with the gradual deepening of the dusk. Letty sat beside him in her smartly-cut, golden-colored frock, looking up into his face as she waited for him to speak. And when he had told her, she sat quite silently, her smooth brown head lowered over hands clenched rather closely in her lap.

Graham waited wretchedly for some remark from her, and looking presently at her lowered face, saw two tears fall slowly on to her hands. He had a sudden passionate desire to take her still, slight body into his arms to kiss away her tears as he had so often done in the old happy days but the barrier that had grown up between them with slow but insidious sureness during the last few years still seemed to stand formidably, and made such an impulsive act impossible.

She sat quite motionless for fully a minute; then the floodgates of her tears seemed to break away from her control. She covered her face with her hands, and leaned her head against the friendly trunk of the tree, crying in her quiet, silent way.

The barrier forgotten, Graham took her in his arms.

"I'm sorry, Letty," he said desperately. "I can't tell you how sorry I am to bring you home to this.

Her brown head burrowed a little closer against his shoulder for just a fleeting moment; then she looked up at him.

"Phil," she said, with the half-mischievous, wholly sweet smile of the old Letty bright in her eyes, "don't you know that people often cry for joy? I— I'm crying for joy. I suppose it's quite ridiculous— but there it is!"

She laughed softly into his puzzled face and continued: —

"Do you think for one moment that I'll mind leaving Oakwood, where we've never been really happy, or that I'll regret going back to Hollybush where we were always happy? Oh, Phil, Phil!" – she caught with both her hands at the lapels of his coat, and looked up at him with wistful eyes, "Don't you see? The battling together might bring happiness again. I've missed it so – I've missed it so terribly!"

He stared at her for a moment, speechlessly. "You mean," he said slowly, then, "that you won't mind going back again— that you won't mind losing all that money, success, have meant? Is that what you mean, Letty? . . . I don't quite understand."

She gave another soft laugh. "No; perhaps a man could not properly understand; but I know this, Phil, that you and I will be far happier, battling together at Hollybush once more, than we have ever been during all the prosperous times at Oakwood. And, when you get on again, as I am sure you will, we must try to benefit by our knowledge of the many foolish things that we allowed to creep in and spoil our happiness."

"But Hollybush," he said, weakly. "It was sold— long ago."

"Yes, to me," she replied coolly. "You see, you were always so generous with money, Phil. I found that I couldn't bear anyone else to really own that little old home. I bought it through an agent who arranged to let it only to people who would always look after it beautifully for me. We'll go back to it; and Phil, Phil, dear," she continued, a little breathlessly; "there is someone else who wants to share it with us— the funniest little snub-nosed, curly-fingered son that ever —"

It was several seconds before he could fully realise what she was trying to say, and then he caught at her shoulders, staring down into her tear-filled eyes.

"A son— whose son?" he demanded sharply.

"Ours, Phil" she replied quietly. "You see, I was not quite happy here, and I thought I might be a worry to you with all your important contracts ahead; so I decided to go up to Edith. He, Phil Junior, is waiting inside for us. I did try so hard to keep him awake, but he refused. He was greedy. He had too much tea, and he—"

But Graham, with a sudden uncontrollable sob, took her in his arms so suddenly, and held her so tightly, that further speech was impossible.

A few minutes later they were standing beside the cot that Molly had managed to smuggle into the house. Letty drew back the dainty bed-clothes to give her husband a clearer view of a tiny puckered face. "Phil," she said softly; "don't you think that what has been given is so much more precious than what has been taken away?" But Graham could not speak. His arms just tightened about her shoulder as he stood looking down at his son.

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5: Down from Gunyah

Silas Snell

Edward Dyson, 1865-1931

Critic (Adelaide) 12 Dec 1903

A Remembrance of a Melbourne Cup Meeting.

I HAVE MET with many natives born and bred "out back" who firmly believe, and are prepared to maintain with oracular arguments or in a ring, that the miserable bush townships in the vicinity of which their lives have been spent, can on occasion provide scenes of excitement and stirring, surging life to be surpassed in no city on earth, but Mogg is the most obstinate and aggravating ignoramus of the lot.

John Mogg arrived in Melbourne unexpectedly just before last Cup. John was a tall, ungainly young man, whose joints made conspicuous promontories in his clothes, whose trousers were too short by half, and whose boots were far and away too large for any mere man. Besides all this, Mogg was unshaven and unshorn, he had the complexion of an old tan boot, and he wore a pyramidal felt hat quite a foot high, ornamented with a leather belt. The coat he had on terminated Suddenly in the region of his waist, and he had thrust himself too far through the sleeves, and refused to retract. Altogether, John Henry Mogg looked as much at home in the bright, busy streets of the city as a cat-fish might be expected to look in a duststorm.

John came down from Gunyah for the Cup, and was gloomily convinced that he was missing all the life and entertainment in consequence of this rash act. He was very sorry, he said, he did not stay up at Gunyah and see the fun. There was to be a tin-kettling or a dog fight at Gunyah. John Henry's faith in Gunyah was simply marvellous. He had never been twenty miles from his birthplace before, and although Gunyah was a lopsided, paling-built township supported by one tinpot sawmill and a few woebegone cows, he firmly believed there was not another place on the face of creation to compare with it for enterprise and delirious life.

My young friend came to Melbourne entirely or his own accord, and he put up at my house on his own initiative, without invitation or pressure, and yet throughout his stay he regarded me with a certain truculent reproachfulness as if I were entirelyresponsible for the fact that he was depriving himself of the common joys and intellectual advantages of Gunyah. I led him about and showed him round at my own expense. He was as dull as a croupy hen on a wet day. He glanced at Parliament House, casually, and said: "You ain't seen Gunyah Court-house, have yeh?" I had not. Gunyah Court-house was a recent addition. John Henry was obviously sorry for me.

"You should come up and see it," he said.

The Public Library had its disadvantages. John looked it over, and said: "Gunyah Lib'ry's next Bullocky's pub. Yeh can get drinks through a slot in the wall." The crowd in Bourke-street on Saturday night failed to impress hilmi: "Y' orter s'ee Gunyah on pay-day!" was his brief comment after two or three turns up and down.

Patience is my particular virtue, but John Henry Mogg got on my nerves in a very short time, and an unreasonable and unworthy desire to astound the stolid bucolic and stir him out of his contemptuous lethargy possessed my soul. When I treated him to excellent whisky he said critically: "My oath! yeh get the real stuff at Bullocky's up Gunyah."

Yet I know by burning experience that the whisky at Gunyah is fit for nothing but to poison rats or etch process blocks, and that a pint of Gunyah whisky would burn all the lining out of a seasoned alligator from Queensland.

The Yarra was not a circumstance compared with Cow Creek, and John was filled with contempt for our theatrical performances when he recalled the things he had seen at Muldoon's Temperance Hall "up to Gunyah," and when we had walked round the Exhibition Building he remarked in a tired way, "It reminds me of Brownie's milkin' shed up Gunyah, but more squat like."

I began to scheme for my revenge, and determined to take it out of him on the hill and flat on Cup Day, when I would rush him right into the human maelstrom and literally overwhelm him. I did rush him in; at least I rushed him as much as it was possible to rush a deadly ponderous person who lifted his feet as if they were pile-drivers, and exhibited the youthful vivacity of a leaden tombstone. We stood on a coign of vantage, and saw Flennington spread out below in all its glory of lawn and flower, of beautiful women and brave horses, and Mogg glanced over it all indifferently, and sighed thirstily and said:

"Wish I was up Gunyah. Stringybark Mick an' Tommy the 'Possum are goin' to race their horses fer half a quid at the pound today."

I snorted with unspeakable derision, and dragged him away, dragged him wherever the crowd was thickest, hungering for excitement and slaughter. Wherever the flat crowd was most dense, and noisy, and vehement, I led the man from Gunyah, determined that ere the day was spent I would wring from him an assertion of the inferiority of his native place in one particular at least. He should admit that Melbourne was more crowded and fightable if I had to half-kill him to wring the confession from his lips.

He was jostled and scruffed and knocked about, his toes were trodden upon by great men, he was ground against walls and fences, and nearly smothered in a press around a horse gamble. Not being accustomed to crowds, he was continually getting into adverse currents and whirling eddies, and being tossed, and elbowed, and jainmed, and damaged, but he preserved his old air of

indifference, and looked all the time like a man whose life was made up of daily experiences of this kind, and who found it tame and depressing on the whole. I dragged him hither and thither. I saw him bored by howling pushes, assaulted by indignant females, and bustled by the police. Once he went down before a mad pack in pursuit of a welsher and was unmercifully trodden on. He picked himself up, hatless, torn, dirty, and bleeding, but word of surprise escaped his lips.

"They'd have hunted him on horses in Gunyah," he said.

Pitiless now, I led him into a dense crowd rushing in after the finish of the Cup, and at length saw him caught in the vortex and carried down.

We rescued him with considerable difficulty (a couple of policemen and I), and with still greater difficulty conveyed him into a booth. He was quite unconscious, having received a bad blow on the head. We poured brandy down his throat, and used other remedies, and after ten minutes he sighed deeply and his eyes opened. I stood over him eager to hear at last an expression of astonishment, a confession of the superior density and velocity of Melbourne crowds.

Mogg pulled himself together, and said feebly:

"My oath! That was pretty near as bad as Gunyah on show day."

John Mogg returned to his native place a week later, and I was delighted to miss him very much. I had a letter from him the other day, in which he expressed a wish that I would visit Gunyah when it was proclaimed the Federal capital.

6: The Undertakers

Rudyard Kipling

1865-1936

New York World, 8 Nov 1894

Collected in: *The Second Jungle Book*, 1895

When ye say to Tabaqui, "My Brother!"
when ye call the Hyena to meat,
Ye may cry the Full Truce with Jacala
—the Belly that runs on four feet.
— Jungle Law

"RESPECT the aged!"

"It was a thick voice— a muddy voice that would have made you shudder— a voice like something soft breaking in two. There was a quaver in it, a croak and a whine.

"Respect the aged! O Companions of the River— respect the aged!"

Nothing could be seen on the broad reach of the river except a little fleet of square-sailed, wooden-pinned barges, loaded with building-stone, that had just come under the railway bridge, and were driving down-stream. They put their clumsy helms over to avoid the sand-bar made by the scour of the bridge-piers, and as they passed, three abreast, the horrible voice began again:

"O Brahmins of the River— respect the aged and infirm!"

A boatman turned where he sat on the gunwale, lifted up his hand, said something that was not a blessing, and the boats creaked on through the twilight. The broad Indian river, that looked more like a chain of little lakes than a stream, was as smooth as glass, reflecting the sandy-red sky in mid-channel, but splashed with patches of yellow and dusky purple near and under the low banks. Little creeks ran into the river in the wet season, but now their dry mouths hung clear above water-line. On the left shore, and almost under the railway bridge, stood a mud-and-brick and thatch-and-stick village, whose main street, full of cattle going back to their byres, ran straight to the river, and ended in a sort of rude brick pier-head, where people who wanted to wash could wade in step by step. That was the Ghaut of the village of Mugger-Ghaut.

Night was falling fast over the fields of lentils and rice and cotton in the low-lying ground yearly flooded by the river; over the reeds that fringed the elbow of the bend, and the tangled jungle of the grazing-grounds behind the still reeds. The parrots and crows, who had been chattering and shouting over their evening drink, had flown inland to roost, crossing the out-going battalions of the flying-foxes; and cloud upon cloud of water-birds came whistling and "honking" to the cover of the reed-beds. There were geese, barrel-headed and black-

backed, teal, widgeon, mallard, and sheldrake, with curlews, and here and there a flamingo.

A lumbering Adjutant-crane brought up the rear, flying as though each slow stroke would be his last.

"Respect the aged! Brahmins of the River— respect the aged!"

The Adjutant half turned his head, sheered a little in the direction of the voice, and landed stiffly on the sand-bar below the bridge. Then you saw what a ruffianly brute he really was. His back view was immensely respectable, for he stood nearly six feet high, and looked rather like a very proper bald-headed parson. In front it was different, for his Ally Sloper-like head and neck had not a feather to them, and there was a horrible raw-skin pouch on his neck under his chin— a hold-all for the things his pick-axe beak might steal. His legs were long and thin and skinny, but he moved them delicately, and looked at them with pride as he preened down his ashy-gray tail-feathers, glanced over the smooth of his shoulder, and stiffened into "Stand at attention."

A mangy little Jackal, who had been yapping hungrily on a low bluff, cocked up his ears and tail, and scuttered across the shallows to join the Adjutant.

He was the lowest of his caste— not that the best of jackals are good for much, but this one was peculiarly low, being half a beggar, half a criminal— a cleaner-up of village rubbish-heaps, desperately timid or wildly bold, everlastingly hungry, and full of cunning that never did him any good.

"Ugh!" he said, shaking himself dolefully as he landed. "May the red mange destroy the dogs of this village! I have three bites for each flea upon me, and all because I looked— only looked, mark you— at an old shoe in a cow-byre. Can I eat mud?" He scratched himself under his left ear.

"I heard," said the Adjutant, in a voice like a blunt saw going through a thick board— "I *heard* there was a new-born puppy in that same shoe."

"To hear is one thing; to know is another," said the Jackal, who had a very fair knowledge of proverbs, picked up by listening to men round the village fires of an evening.

"Quite true. So, to make sure, I took care of that puppy while the dogs were busy elsewhere."

"They were *very* busy," said the Jackal. "Well, I must not go to the village hunting for scraps yet awhile. And so there truly was a blind puppy in that shoe?"

"It is here," said the Adjutant, squinting over his beak at his full pouch. "A small thing, but acceptable now that charity is dead in the world."

"*Ahai*! The world is iron in these days," wailed the Jackal. Then his restless eye caught the least possible ripple on the water, and he went on quickly: "Life is hard for us all, and I doubt not that even our excellent master, the Pride of the Ghaut and the Envy of the River—"

"A liar, a flatterer, and a Jackal were all hatched out of the same egg," said the Adjutant to nobody in particular; for he was rather a fine sort of a liar on his own account when he took the trouble.

"Yes, the Envy of the River," the Jackal repeated, raising his voice. "Even he, I doubt not, finds that since the bridge has been built good food is more scarce. But on the other hand, though I would by no means say this to his noble face, he is so wise and so virtuous— as I, alas I am not—"

"When the Jackal owns he is gray, how black must the Jackal be!" muttered the Adjutant. He could not see what was coming.

"That his food never fails, and in consequence—"

There was a soft grating sound, as though a boat had just touched in shoal water. The Jackal spun round quickly and faced (it is always best to face) the creature he had been talking about. It was a twenty-four-foot crocodile, cased in what looked like treble-riveted boiler-plate, studded and keeled and crested; the yellow points of his upper teeth just overhanging his beautifully fluted lower jaw. It was the blunt-nosed Mugger of Mugger-Ghaut, older than any man in the village, who had given his name to the village; the demon of the ford before the railway bridge, came— murderer, man-eater, and local fetish in one. He lay with his chin in the shallows, keeping his place by an almost invisible rippling of his tail, and well the Jackal knew that one stroke of that same tail in the water would carry the Mugger up the bank with the rush of a steam-engine.

"Auspiciously met, Protector of the Poor!" he fawned, backing at every word. "A delectable voice was heard, and we came in the hopes of sweet conversation. My tailless presumption, while waiting here, led me, indeed, to speak of thee. It is my hope that nothing was overheard."

Now the Jackal had spoken just to be listened to, for he knew flattery was the best way of getting things to eat, and the Mugger knew that the Jackal had spoken for this end, and the Jackal knew that the Mugger knew, and the Mugger knew that the Jackal knew that the Mugger knew, and so they were all very contented together.

The old brute pushed and panted and grunted up the bank, mumbling, "Respect the aged and infirm!" and all the time his little eyes burned like coals under the heavy, horny eyelids on the top of his triangular head, as he shoved his bloated barrel-body along between his crutched legs. Then he settled down, and, accustomed as the Jackal was to his ways, he could not help starting, for the hundredth time, when he saw how exactly the Mugger imitated a log adrift on the bar. He had even taken pains to lie at the exact angle a naturally stranded log would make with the water, having regard to the current of the season at the time and place. All this was only a matter of habit, of course, because the Mugger had come ashore for pleasure; but a crocodile is never quite full, and if

the Jackal had been deceived by the likeness he would not have lived to philosophise over it.

"My child, I heard nothing," said the Mugger, shutting one eye. "The water was in my ears, and also I was faint with hunger. Since the railway bridge was built my people at my village have ceased to love me; and that is breaking my heart."

"Ah, shame!" said the Jackal. "So noble a heart, too! But men are all alike, to my mind."

"Nay, there are very great differences indeed," the Mugger answered gently. "Some are as lean as boat-poles. Others again are fat as young ja— dogs. Never would I causelessly revile men. They are of all fashions, but the long years have shown me that, one with another, they are very good. Men, women, and children— I have no fault to find with them. And remember, child, he who rebukes the World is rebuked by the World."

"Flattery is worse than an empty tin can in the belly. But that which we have just heard is wisdom," said the Adjutant, bringing down one foot.

"Consider, though, their ingratitude to this excellent one," began the Jackal tenderly.

"Nay, nay, not ingratitude!" the Mugger said. "They do not think for others; that is all. But I have noticed, lying at my station below the ford, that the stairs of the new bridge are cruelly hard to climb, both for old people and young children. The old, indeed, are not so worthy of consideration, but I am grieved— I am truly grieved— on account of the fat children. Still, I think, in a little while, when the newness of the bridge has worn away, we shall see my people's bare brown legs bravely splashing through the ford as before. Then the old Mugger will be honoured again."

"But surely I saw Marigold wreaths floating off the edge of the Ghaut only this noon," said the Adjutant.

Marigold wreaths are a sign of reverence all India over.

"An error— an error. It was the wife of the sweetmeat-seller. She loses her eyesight year by year, and cannot tell a log from me— the Mugger of the Ghaut. I saw the mistake when she threw the garland, for I was lying at the very foot of the Ghaut, and had she taken another step I might have shown her some little difference. Yet she meant well, and we must consider the spirit of the offering."

"What good are marigold wreaths when one is on the rubbish-heap?" said the Jackal, hunting for fleas, but keeping one wary eye on his Protector of the Poor.

"True, but they have not yet begun to make the rubbish-heap that shall carry *me*. Five times have I seen the river draw back from the village and make new land at the foot of the street. Five times have I seen the village rebuilt on the banks, and I shall see it built yet five times more. I am no faithless, fish-hunting

Gavial, I, at Kasi to-day and Prayag to-morrow, as the saying is, but the true and constant watcher of the ford. It is not for nothing, child, that the village bears my name, and 'he who watches long,' as the saying is, 'shall at last have his reward.'"

"*I* have watched long— very long— nearly all my life, and my reward has been bites and blows," said the Jackal.

"Ho! ho! ho!" roared the Adjutant.

"In August was the Jackal born;
The Rains fell in September;
'Now such a fearful flood as this,'
Says he, 'I can't remember!'"

There is one very unpleasant peculiarity about the Adjutant. At uncertain times he suffers from acute attacks of the fidgets or cramp in his legs, and though he is more virtuous to behold than any of the cranes, who are all immensely respectable, he flies off into wild, cripple-stilt war-dances, half opening his wings and bobbing his bald head up and down; while for reasons best known to himself he is very careful to time his worst attacks with his nastiest remarks. At the last word of his song he came to attention again, ten times adjutaunter than before.

The Jackal winced, though he was full three seasons old, but you cannot resent an insult from a person with a beak a yard long, and the power of driving it like a javelin. The Adjutant was a most notorious coward, but the Jackal was worse.

"We must live before we can learn," said the Mugger, "and there is this to say: Little jackals are very common, child, but such a mugger as I am is not common. For all that, I am not proud, since pride is destruction; but take notice, it is Fate, and against his Fate no one who swims or walks or runs should say anything at all. I am well contented with Fate. With good luck, a keen eye, and the custom of considering whether a creek or a backwater has an outlet to it ere you ascend, much may be done."

"Once I heard that even the Protector of the Poor made a mistake," said the Jackal viciously.

"True; but there my Fate helped me. It was before I had come to my full growth— before the last famine but three (by the Right and Left of Gunga, how full used the streams to be in those days!). Yes, I was young and unthinking, and when the flood came, who so pleased as I? A little made me very happy then. The village was deep in flood, and I swam above the Ghaut and went far inland, up to the rice-fields, and they were deep in good mud. I remember also a pair of bracelets (glass they were, and troubled me not a little) that I found that

evening. Yes, glass bracelets; and, if my memory serves me well, a shoe. I should have shaken off both shoes, but I was hungry. I learned better later. Yes. And so I fed and rested me; but when I was ready to go to the river again the flood had fallen, and I walked through the mud of the main street. Who but I? Came out all my people, priests and women and children, and I looked upon them with benevolence. The mud is not a good place to fight in. Said a boatman, 'Get axes and kill him, for he is the Mugger of the ford.' 'Not so,' said the Brahmin. 'Look, he is driving the flood before him! He is the godling of the village.' Then they threw many flowers at me, and by happy thought one led a goat across the road."

"How good— how very good is goat!" said the Jackal.

"Hairy— too hairy, and when found in the water more than likely to hide a cross-shaped hook. But that goat I accepted, and went down to the Ghaut in great honour. Later, my Fate sent me the boatman who had desired to cut off my tail with an axe. His boat grounded upon an old shoal which you would not remember."

"We are not *all* jackals here," said the Adjutant. "Was it the shoal made where the stone-boats sank in the year of the great drouth— a long shoal that lasted three floods?"

"There were two," said the Mugger; "an upper and a lower shoal."

"Ay, I forgot. A channel divided them, and later dried up again," said the Adjutant, who prided himself on his memory.

"On the lower shoal my well-wisher's craft grounded. He was sleeping in the bows, and, half awake, leaped over to his waist— no, it was no more than to his knees— to push off. His empty boat went on and touched again below the next reach, as the river ran then. I followed, because I knew men would come out to drag it ashore."

"And did they do so?" said the Jackal, a little awe-stricken. This was hunting on a scale that impressed him.

"There and lower down they did. I went no farther, but that gave me three in one day— well-fed *manjis* (boatmen) all, and, except in the case of the last (then I was careless), never a cry to warn those on the bank."

"Ah, noble sport! But what cleverness and great judgment it requires!" said the Jackal.

"Not cleverness, child, but only thought. A little thought in life is like salt upon rice, as the boatmen say, and I have thought deeply always. The Gavial, my cousin, the fish-eater, has told me how hard it is for him to follow his fish, and how one fish differs from the other, and how he must know them all, both together and apart. I say that is wisdom; but, on the other hand, my cousin, the Gavial, lives among his people. *My* people do not swim in companies, with their mouths out of the water, as Rewa does; nor do they constantly rise to the

surface of the water, and turn over on their sides, like Mohoo and little Chapta; nor do they gather in shoals after flood, like Batchua and Chilwa."

"All are very good eating," said the Adjutant, clattering his beak.

"So my cousin says, and makes a great to-do over hunting them, but they do not climb the banks to escape his sharp nose. *My* people are otherwise. Their life is on the land, in the houses, among the cattle. I must know what they do, and what they are about to do; and adding the tail to the trunk, as the saying is, I make up the whole elephant. Is there a green branch and an iron ring hanging over a doorway? The old Mugger knows that a boy has been born in that house, and must some day come down to the Ghaut to play. Is a maiden to be married? The old Mugger knows, for he sees the men carry gifts back and forth; and she, too, comes down to the Ghaut to bathe before her wedding, and— he is there. Has the river changed its channel, and made new land where there was only sand before? The Mugger knows."

"Now, of what use is that knowledge?" said the Jackal. "The river has shifted even in my little life." Indian rivers are nearly always moving about in their beds, and will shift, sometimes, as much as two or three miles in a season, drowning the fields on one bank, and spreading good silt on the other.

"There is no knowledge so useful," said the Mugger, "for new land means new quarrels. The Mugger knows. Oho! the Mugger knows. As soon as the water has drained off, he creeps up the little creeks that men think would not hide a dog, and there he waits. Presently comes a farmer saying he will plant cucumbers here, and melons there, in the new land that the river has given him. He feels the good mud with his bare toes. Anon comes another, saying he will put onions, and carrots, and sugar-cane in such and such places. They meet as boats adrift meet, and each rolls his eye at the other under the big blue turban. The old Mugger sees and hears. Each calls the other 'Brother,' and they go to mark out the boundaries of the new land. The Mugger hurries with them from point to point, shuffling very low through the mud. Now they begin to quarrel! Now they say hot words! Now they pull turbans! Now they lift up their *lathis* (clubs), and, at last, one falls backward into the mud, and the other runs away. When he comes back the dispute is settled, as the iron-bound bamboo of the loser witnesses. Yet they are not grateful to the Mugger. No, they cry 'Murder!' and their families fight with sticks, twenty a-side. My people are good people— upland Jats— Malwais of the Bet. They do not give blows for sport, and, when the fight is done, the old Mugger waits far down the river, out of sight of the village, behind the *kikar*-scrub yonder. Then come they down, my broad-shouldered Jats— eight or nine together under the stars, bearing the dead man upon a bed. They are old men with gray beards, and voices as deep as mine. They light a little fire— ah! how well I know that fire!— and they drink tobacco, and they nod their heads together forward in a ring, or sideways toward the

dead man upon the bank. They say the English Law will come with a rope for this matter, and that such a man's family will be ashamed, because such a man must be hanged in the great square of the Jail. Then say the friends of the dead, 'Let him hang!' and the talk is all to do over again— once, twice, twenty times in the long night. Then says one, at last, 'The fight was a fair fight. Let us take blood-money, a little more than is offered by the slayer, and we will say no more about it.' Then do they haggle over the blood-money, for the dead was a strong man, leaving many sons. Yet before amratvela (sunrise) they put the fire to him a little, as the custom is, and the dead man comes to me, and *he* says no more about it. Aha! my children, the Mugger knows— the Mugger knows— and my Malwah Jats are a good people!"

"They are too close— too narrow in the hand for my crop," croaked the Adjutant. "They waste not the polish on the cow's horn, as the saying is; and, again, who can glean after a Malwai?"

"Ah, I— glean— *them*," said the Mugger.

"Now, in Calcutta of the South, in the old days," the Adjutant went on, "everything was thrown into the streets, and we picked and chose. Those wore dainty seasons. But to-day they keep their streets as clean as the outside of an egg, and my people fly away. To be clean is one thing; to dust, sweep, and sprinkle seven times a day wearies the very Gods themselves."

"There was a down-country jackal had it from a brother, who told me, that in Calcutta of the South all the jackals were as fat as otters in the Rains," said the Jackal, his mouth watering at the bare thought of it.

"Ah, but the white-faces are there— the English, and they bring dogs from somewhere down the river in boats— big fat dogs— to keep those same jackals lean," said the Adjutant.

"They are, then, as hard-hearted as these people? I might have known. Neither earth, sky, nor water shows charity to a jackal. I saw the tents of a white-face last season, after the Rains, and I also took a new yellow bridle to eat. The white-faces do not dress their leather in the proper way. It made me very sick."

"That was better than my case," said the Adjutant. "When I was in my third season, a young and a bold bird, I went down to the river where the big boats come in. The boats of the English are thrice as big as this village."

"He has been as far as Delhi, and says all the people there walk on their heads," muttered the Jackal. The Mugger opened his left eye, and looked keenly at the Adjutant.

"It is true," the big bird insisted. "A liar only lies when he hopes to be believed. No one who had not seen those boats *could* believe this truth."

"*That* is more reasonable," said the Mugger. "And then?"

"From the insides of this boat they were taking out great pieces of white stuff, which, in a little while, turned to water. Much split off, and fell about on the shore, and the rest they swiftly put into a house with thick walls. But a boatman, who laughed, took a piece no larger than a small dog, and threw it to me. I— all my people— swallow without reflection, and that piece I swallowed as is our custom. Immediately I was afflicted with an excessive cold which, beginning in my crop, ran down to the extreme end of my toes, and deprived me even of speech, while the boatmen laughed at me. Never have I felt such cold. I danced in my grief and amazement till I could recover my breath and then I danced and cried out against the falseness of this world; and the boatmen derided me till they fell down. The chief wonder of the matter, setting aside that marvellous coldness, was that there was nothing at all in my crop when I had finished my lamentings!"

The Adjutant had done his very best to describe his feelings after swallowing a seven-pound lump of Wenham Lake ice, off an American ice-ship, in the days before Calcutta made her ice by machinery; but as he did not know what ice was, and as the Mugger and the Jackal knew rather less, the tale missed fire.

"Anything," said the Mugger, shutting his left eye again— "*Anything* is possible that comes out of a boat thrice the size of Mugger-Ghaut. My village is not a small one."

There was a whistle overhead on the bridge, and the Delhi Mail slid across, all the carriages gleaming with light, and the shadows faithfully following along the river. It clanked away into the dark again; but the Mugger and the Jackal were so well used to it that they never turned their heads.

"Is that anything less wonderful than a boat thrice the size of Mugger-Ghaut?" said the bird, looking up.

"I saw that built, child. Stone by stone I saw the bridge-piers rise, and when the men fell off (they were wondrous sure-footed for the most part— but *when* they fell) I was ready. After the first pier was made they never thought to look down the stream for the body to burn. There, again, I saved much trouble. There was nothing strange in the building of the bridge," said the Mugger.

"But that which goes across, pulling the roofed carts! That is strange," the Adjutant repeated. "It is, past any doubt, a new breed of bullock. Some day it will not be able to keep its foothold up yonder, and will fall as the men did. The old Mugger will then be ready."

The Jackal looked at the Adjutant and the Adjutant looked at the Jackal. If there was one thing they were more certain of than another, it was that the engine was everything in the wide world except a bullock. The Jackal had watched it time and again from the aloe hedges by the side of the line, and the Adjutant had seen engines since the first locomotive ran in India. But the

Mugger had only looked up at the thing from below, where the brass dome seemed rather like a bullock's hump.

"M— yes, a new kind of bullock," the Mugger repeated ponderously, to make himself quite sure in his own mind; and "Certainly it is a bullock," said the Jackal.

"And again it might be—" began the Mugger pettishly.

"Certainly— most certainly," said the Jackal, without waiting for the other to finish.

"What?" said the Mugger angrily, for he could feel that the others knew more than he did. "What might it be? *I* never finished my words. You said it was a bullock."

"It is anything the Protector of the Poor pleases. I am *his* servant— not the servant of the thing that crosses the river."

"Whatever it is, it is white-face work," said the Adjutant; "and for my own part, I would not lie out upon a place so near to it as this bar."

"You do not know the English as I do," said the Mugger. "There was a white-face here when the bridge was built, and he would take a boat in the evenings and shuffle with his feet on the bottom-boards, and whisper: 'Is he here? Is he there? Bring me my gun.' I could hear him before I could see him— each sound that he made— creaking and puffing and rattling his gun, up and down the river. As surely as I had picked up one of his workmen, and thus saved great expense in wood for the burning, so surely would he come down to the Ghaut, and shout in a loud voice that he would hunt me, and rid the river of me— the Mugger of Mugger-Ghaut! *me*! Children, I have swum under the bottom of his boat for hour after hour, and heard him fire his gun at logs; and when I was well sure he was wearied, I have risen by his side and snapped my jaws in his face. When the bridge was finished he went away. All the English hunt in that fashion, except when they are hunted."

"Who hunts the white-faces?" yapped the Jackal excitedly.

"No one now, but I have hunted them in my time."

"I remember a little of that Hunting. I was young then," said the Adjutant, clattering his beak significantly.

"I was well established here. My village was being builded for the third time, as I remember, when my cousin, the Gavial, brought me word of rich waters above Benares. At first I would not go, for my cousin, who is a fish-eater, does not always know the good from the bad; but I heard my people talking in the evenings, and what they said made me certain."

"And what did they say?" the Jackal asked.

"They said enough to make me, the Mugger of Mugger-Ghaut, leave water and take to my feet. I went by night, using the littlest streams as they served me; but it was the beginning of the hot weather, and all streams were low. I

crossed dusty roads; I went through tall grass; I climbed hills in the moonlight. Even rocks did I climb, children— consider this well. I crossed the tail of Sirhind, the waterless, before I could find the set of the little rivers that flow Gungaward. I was a month's journey from my own people and the river that I knew. That was very marvellous!"

"What food on the way?" said the Jackal, who kept his soul in his little stomach, and was not a bit impressed by the Mugger's land travels.

"That which I could find— *cousin*," said the Mugger slowly, dragging each word.

Now you do not call a man a cousin in India unless you think you can establish some kind of blood-relationship, and as it is only in old fairy-tales that the Mugger ever marries a jackal, the Jackal knew for what reason he had been suddenly lifted into the Mugger's family circle. If they had been alone he would not have cared, but the Adjutant's eyes twinkled with mirth at the ugly jest.

"Assuredly, Father, I might have known," said the Jackal. A mugger does not care to be called a father of jackals, and the Mugger of Mugger-Ghaut said as much— and a great deal more which there is no use in repeating here.

"The Protector of the Poor has claimed kinship. How can I remember the precise degree? Moreover, we eat the same food. He has said it," was the Jackal's reply.

That made matters rather worse, for what the Jackal hinted at was that the Mugger must have eaten his food on that land-march fresh and fresh every day, instead of keeping it by him till it was in a fit and proper condition, as every self-respecting mugger and most wild beasts do when they can. Indeed, one of the worst terms of contempt along the River-bed is "eater of fresh meat." It is nearly as bad as calling a man a cannibal.

"That food was eaten thirty seasons ago," said the Adjutant quietly. "If we talk for thirty seasons more it will never come back. Tell us, now, what happened when the good waters were reached after thy most wonderful land journey. If we listened to the howling of every jackal the business of the town would stop, as the saying is."

The Mugger must have been grateful for the interruption, because he went on, with a rush:

"By the Right and Left of Gunga! when I came there never did I see such waters!"

"Were they better, then, than the big flood of last season?" said the Jackal.

"Better! That flood was no more than comes every five years— a handful of drowned strangers, some chickens, and a dead bullock in muddy water with cross-currents. But the season I think of, the river was low, smooth, and even, and, as the Gavial had warned me, the dead English came down, touching each

other. I got my girth in that season— my girth and my depth. From Agra, by Etawah and the broad waters by Allahabad—"

"Oh, the eddy that set under the walls of the fort at Allahabad!" said the Adjutant. "They came in there like widgeon to the reeds, and round and round they swung— thus!"

He went off into his horrible dance again, while the Jackal looked on enviously. He naturally could not remember the terrible year of the Mutiny they were talking about. The Mugger continued:

"Yes, by Allahabad one lay still in the slack-water and let twenty go by to pick one; and, above all, the English were not cumbered with jewellery and nose-rings and anklets as my women are nowadays. To delight in ornaments is to end with a rope for a necklace, as the saying is. All the muggers of all the rivers grew fat then, but it was my Fate to be fatter than them all. The news was that the English were being hunted into the rivers, and by the Right and Left of Gunga! we believed it was true. So far as I went south I believed it to be true; and I went down-stream beyond Monghyr and the tombs that look over the river."

"I know that place," said the Adjutant. "Since those days Monghyr is a lost city. Very few live there now."

"Thereafter I worked up-stream very slowly and lazily, and a little above Monghyr there came down a boatful of white-faces— alive! They were, as I remember, women, lying under a cloth spread over sticks, and crying aloud. There was never a gun fired at us, the watchers of the fords in those days. All the guns were busy elsewhere. We could hear them day and night inland, coming and going as the wind shifted. I rose up full before the boat, because I had never seen white-faces alive, though I knew them well— otherwise. A naked white child kneeled by the side of the boat, and, stooping over, must needs try to trail his hands in the river. It is a pretty thing to see how a child loves running water. I had fed that day, but there was yet a little unfilled space within me. Still, it was for sport and not for food that I rose at the child's hands. They were so clear a mark that I did not even look when I closed; but they were so small that though my jaws rang true— I am sure of that— the child drew them up swiftly, unhurt. They must have passed between tooth and tooth— those small white hands. I should have caught him cross-wise at the elbows; but, as I said, it was only for sport and desire to see new things that I rose at all. They cried out one after another in the boat, and presently I rose again to watch them. The boat was too heavy to push over. They were only women, but he who trusts a woman will walk on duckweed in a pool, as the saying is: and by the Right and Left of Gunga, that is truth!"

"Once a woman gave me some dried skin from a fish," said the Jackal. "I had hoped to get her baby, but horse-food is better than the kick of a horse, as the saying is. What did thy woman do?"

"She fired at me with a short gun of a kind I have never seen before or since. Five times, one after another" (the Mugger must have met with an old-fashioned revolver); "and I stayed open-mouthed and gaping, my head in the smoke. Never did I see such a thing. Five times, as swiftly as I wave my tail— thus!"

The Jackal, who had been growing more and more interested in the story, had just time to leap back as the huge tail swung by like a scythe.

"Not before the fifth shot," said the Mugger, as though he had never dreamed of stunning one of his listeners— "not before the fifth shot did I sink, and I rose in time to hear a boatman telling all those white women that I was most certainly dead. One bullet had gone under a neck-plate of mine. I know not if it is there still, for the reason I cannot turn my head. Look and see, child. It will show that my tale is true."

"I?" said the Jackal. "Shall an eater of old shoes, a bone-cracker, presume, to doubt the word of the Envy of the River? May my tail be bitten off by blind puppies if the shadow of such a thought has crossed my humble mind! The Protector of the Poor has condescended to inform me, his slave, that once in his life he has been wounded by a woman. That is sufficient, and I will tell the tale to all my children, asking for no proof."

"Over-much civility is sometimes no better than over-much discourtesy, for, as the saying is, one can choke a guest with curds. I do *not* desire that any children of thine should know that the Mugger of Mugger-Ghaut took his only wound from a woman. They will have much else to think of if they get their meat as miserably as does their father."

"It is forgotten long ago! It was never said! There never was a white woman! There was no boat! Nothing whatever happened at all."

The Jackal waved his brush to show how completely everything was wiped out of his memory, and sat down with an air.

"Indeed, very many things happened," said the Mugger, beaten in his second attempt that night to get the better of his friend. (Neither bore malice, however. Eat and be eaten was fair law along the river, and the Jackal came in for his share of plunder when the Mugger had finished a meal.) "I left that boat and went up-stream, and, when I had reached Arrah and the back-waters behind it, there were no more dead English. The river was empty for a while. Then came one or two dead, in red coats, not English, but of one kind all— Hindus and Purbeeahs— then five and six abreast, and at last, from Arrah to the North beyond Agra, it was as though whole villages had walked into the water. They came out of little creeks one after another, as the logs come down in the Rains. When the river rose they rose also in companies from the shoals they had rested upon; and the falling flood dragged them with it across the fields and through the Jungle by the long hair. All night, too, going North, I heard the guns, and by

day the shod feet of men crossing fords, and that noise which a heavy cart-wheel makes on sand under water; and every ripple brought more dead. At last even I was afraid, for I said: 'If this thing happen to men, how shall the Mugger of Mugger-Ghaut escape?' There were boats, too, that came up behind me without sails, burning continually, as the cotton-boats sometimes burn, but never sinking."

"Ah!" said the Adjutant. "Boats like those come to Calcutta of the South. They are tall and black, they beat up the water behind them with a tail, and they—"

"Are thrice as big as my village. *My* boats were low and white; they beat up the water on either side of them and were no larger than the boats of one who speaks truth should be. They made me very afraid, and I left water and went back to this my river, hiding by day and walking by night, when I could not find little streams to help me. I came to my village again, but I did not hope to see any of my people there. Yet they were ploughing and sowing and reaping, and going to and fro in their fields, as quietly as their own cattle."

"Was there still good food in the river?" said the Jackal.

"More than I had any desire for. Even I— and I do not eat mud— even *I* was tired, and, as I remember, a little frightened of this constant coming down of the silent ones. I heard my people say in my village that all the English were dead; but those that came, face down, with the current were *not* English, as my people saw. Then my people said that it was best to say nothing at all, but to pay the tax and plough the land. After a long time the river cleared, and those that came down it had been clearly drowned by the floods, as I could well see; and though it was not so easy then to get food, I was heartily glad of it. A little killing here and there is no bad thing— but even the Mugger is sometimes satisfied, as the saying is."

"Marvellous! Most truly marvellous!" said the Jackal. "I am become fat through merely hearing about so much good eating. And afterward what, if it be permitted to ask, did the Protector of the Poor do?"

"I said to myself— and by the Right and Left of Gunga! I locked my jaws on that vow— I said I would never go roving any more. So I lived by the Ghaut, very close to my own people, and I watched over them year after year; and they loved me so much that they threw marigold wreaths at my head whenever they saw it lift. Yes, and my Fate has been very kind to me, and the river is good enough to respect my poor and infirm presence; only—"

"No one is all happy from his beak to his tail," said the Adjutant sympathetically. "What does the Mugger of Mugger-Ghaut need more?"

"That little white child which I did not get," said the Mugger, with a deep sigh. "He was very small, but I have not forgotten. I am old now, but before I die it is my desire to try one new thing. It is true they are a heavy-footed, noisy, and

foolish people, and the sport would be small, but I remember the old days above Benares, and, if the child lives, he will remember still. It may be he goes up and down the bank of some river, telling how he once passed his hands between the teeth of the Mugger of Mugger-Ghaut, and lived to make a tale of it. My Fate has been very kind, but that plagues me sometimes in my dreams— the thought of the little white child in the bows of that boat." He yawned, and closed his jaws. "And now I will rest and think. Keep silent, my children, and respect the aged."

He turned stiffly, and shuffled to the top of the sand-bar, while the Jackal drew back with the Adjutant to the shelter of a tree stranded on the end nearest the railway bridge.

"That was a pleasant and profitable life," he grinned, looking up inquiringly at the bird who towered above him. "And not once, mark you, did he think fit to tell me where a morsel might have been left along the banks. Yet I have told *him* a hundred times of good things wallowing down-stream. How true is the saying, 'All the world forgets the Jackal and the Barber when the news has been told!' Now he is going to sleep! Arrh!"

"How can a jackal hunt with a Mugger?" said the Adjutant coolly. "Big thief and little thief; it is easy to say who gets the pickings."

The Jackal turned, whining impatiently, and was going to curl himself up under the tree-trunk, when suddenly he cowered, and looked up through the draggled branches at the bridge almost above his head.

"What now?" said the Adjutant, opening his wings uneasily.

"Wait till we see. The wind blows from us to them, but they are not looking for us— those two men."

"Men, is it? My office protects me. All India knows I am holy." The Adjutant, being a first-class scavenger, is allowed to go where he pleases, and so this one never flinched.

"I am not worth a blow from anything better than an old shoe," said the Jackal, and listened again. "Hark to that footfall!" he went on. "That was no country leather, but the shod foot of a white-face. Listen again! Iron hits iron up there! It is a gun! Friend, those heavy-footed, foolish English are coming to speak with the Mugger."

"Warn him, then. He was called Protector of the Poor by some one not unlike a starving Jackal but a little time ago."

"Let my cousin protect his own hide. He has told me again and again there is nothing to fear from the white-faces. They must be white-faces. Not a villager of Mugger-Ghaut would dare to come after him. See, I said it was a gun! Now, with good luck, we shall feed before daylight. He cannot hear well out of water, and— this time it is not a woman!"

A shiny barrel glittered for a minute in the moonlight on the girders. The Mugger was lying on the sand-bar as still as his own shadow, his fore-feet spread out a little, his head dropped between them, snoring like a— mugger.

A voice on the bridge whispered: "It's an odd shot— straight down almost— but as safe as houses. Better try behind the neck. Golly! what a brute! The villagers will be wild if he's shot, though. He's the *deota* [godling] of these parts."

"Don't care a rap," another voice answered; "he took about fifteen of my best coolies while the bridge was building, and it's time he was put a stop to. I've been after him in a boat for weeks. Stand by with the Martini as soon as I've given him both barrels of this."

"Mind the kick, then. A double four-bore's no joke."

"That's for him to decide. Here goes!"

There was a roar like the sound of a small cannon (the biggest sort of elephant-rifle is not very different from some artillery), and a double streak of flame, followed by the stinging crack of a Martini, whose long bullet makes nothing of a crocodile's plates. But the explosive bullets did the work. One of them struck just behind the Mugger's neck, a hand's-breadth to the left of the backbone, while the other burst a little lower down, at the beginning of the tail. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred a mortally-wounded crocodile can scramble to deep water and get away; but the Mugger of Mugger-Ghaut was literally broken into three pieces. He hardly moved his head before the life went out of him, and he lay as flat as the Jackal.

"Thunder and lightning! Lightning and thunder!" said that miserable little beast. "Has the thing that pulls the covered carts over the bridge tumbled at last?"

"It is no more than a gun," said the Adjutant, though his very tail-feathers quivered. "Nothing more than a gun. He is certainly dead. Here come the white-faces."

The two Englishmen had hurried down from the bridge and across to the sand-bar, where they stood admiring the length of the Mugger. Then a native with an axe cut off the big head, and four men dragged it across the spit.

"The last time that I had my hand in a Mugger's mouth," said one of the Englishmen, stooping down (he was the man who had built the bridge), "it was when I was about five years old— coming down the river by boat to Monghyr. I was a Mutiny baby, as they call it. Poor mother was in the boat, too, and she often told me how she fired dad's old pistol at the beast's head."

"Well, you've certainly had your revenge on the chief of the clan— even if the gun has made your nose bleed. Hi, you boatmen! Haul that head up the bank, and we'll boil it for the skull. The skin's too knocked about to keep. Come along to bed now. This was worth sitting up all night for, wasn't it?"

Curiously enough, the Jackal and the Adjutant made the very same remark not three minutes after the men had left.

7: The Devil Doctor

Edgar Wallace

1875-1932

Tit-Bits, 15 Dec 1928

GEORGE REWEN had a weakness for London parks, even on grey days when there was a smell of snow in the air and the rags of last night's fog streaked across the leafless poplars.

He liked them because they seemed to him to be the only places in London where he could breathe and be free from the everlasting rumble and roar of wheeled traffic.

He came out of his hotel with a wistful glance at a gloomy cloud, behind which somewhere was a sun that unfolded the waxy petals of gladioli and drew from the pale heliotrope a heady fragrance. Somewhere it laved the world with a golden glory, and bare-footed children were treading yellow sands....

For the moment it was desperately uncosy; the advance guard of a northern gale was bending the tree-tops, and every few seconds something flat and wet and cold, like a piece of icy confetti, melted on his cheek. He strode at a rare pace along the gravelled path, and was alone except for the lady in the fur coat who walked ahead of him swinging a cane. She came to a cross-path and was undecided as to whether she should turn or continue ahead. He dodged to pass her, collided.

"I'm terribly sorry."

She was very pretty— even as pretty as he thought. The cold morning had given her cheeks a petal pinkness and had been merciful to her straight little nose.

"It was my fault," she smiled, and went on a few paces.

"Excuse me."

He stooped and picked up the flat morocco purse she had dropped. She told him she had dropped that purse in identically the same spot a year before. George Rewen had only lost one purse in his life— just outside Gwelo as he was riding in. Gwelo? Where was Gwelo? Wasn't it in Rhodesia?

She was not at all uncomfortable to find herself in conversation with a perfect stranger, good-looking and thirty-something. The very desolation of the park destroyed much of the convention which holds human beings apart.

They paced together slowly; an overcoated policeman, slapping his hands together and stamping his cold feet, saw them pass and smiled cynically. He thought they were engaged.

He did not ask her name, and she would have been disappointed in him if he had. She might be well off, or she might be poor; working-girls were dressing rather well in England, he had observed during the brief period of his sojourn.

The coat she wore might be the last word in expensive furs. It might also be supplied by one of those stores which cater for the careful.

"Lonely? Yes, I suppose so. There are degrees of loneliness. You would probably feel a little overcrowded in my surroundings— your idea of solitude might frighten me to death!"

She laughed.

George Rewen said good-bye to her with regret, and wished he had had the courage to ask her if she often walked in the park. He could come and find out, but the park was a big place.

Any doubt he had as to her financial position was removed as she passed through the gate. From the middle of the road, a big and shining car drew up to the pavement, a footman got down and touched his cap as she entered the machine. He stood watching, and she bowed to him as the Rolls passed on the other side of the railings.

He did not speak of his mild adventure when he met Dr. Lansen. In truth, Dr. Lansen gave him little opportunity, for the doctor was a great talker, and, unlike most great talkers, was interesting.

He talked through lunch, and when George Rewen was ushered into the smoke-room of Brown's Club that evening (he had promised to call for the doctor at that rendezvous) he was talking even more brilliantly. For he loved an audience.

On the question of criminal psychology he was accepted as an authority, even amongst eminent psychologists. In the course of his interesting career he had acted for seven years as a prison doctor, and was one of the few men in England who had collected systematically the data which is the basis of all scientific observation.

ii

IT was on the evening of the 23rd of December, the last busy day Brown's Club would know until its members straggled back from their holidays, that the doctor stood with his back to the fire and discussed criminals with ten interested men and one unemotional stranger; and George Rewen's boredness was all the more reprehensible because he was Dr. Lansen's personal guest.

Lansen was tall and broad-shouldered; he had a mop of iron-grey hair, and his square, good-humoured face was illuminated— it seemed to reflect any light there was in a room— by round, gold-rimmed spectacles, through which a pair of blue eyes danced with amusement.

"The true criminal is the more difficult to detect because he has no criminal record. The police know him not; his name may be written large in the Court circular but it never appears in the Court registers; he is a highly respected

member of society, a pillar of local institutions, a member of the best clubs, and a popular fellow in the most discriminating circles."

"A pretty fair description of your good self," chuckled old Blathwyte.

"And of you and all of us," Lansen beamed. "In Carey Street is a court which is occupied, year in and year out, with the affairs of foolish men whose liabilities are in excess of their assets. If you sat in those stuffy rooms long enough, you would imagine that an inability to balance income and expenditure was the inevitable preliminary to ruin. Yet is not the City filled with prosperous men who thrive on their liabilities? What is the Old Bailey but a bankruptcy court, where the dismal failures of the criminal world are audited and found incorrect? Clever financiers do not reach bankruptcy. Clever thieves and murderers seldom walk up the stone steps and bow to the judge. Crime and commerce demand training and study; carelessness in either pursuit, lack of experience, lack of foresight, ignorance of detail, faulty organization— in fact, weakness of executive quality leads to disaster, whether you sell butter or cut throats!"

Some of his audience "supposed so"; two dull men who had missed the thread of the argument were prepared to dispute the conclusions. George Rewen was mildly amused, mildly interested. His mind was some six thousand miles away, in a pleasant land that knew not the fog glooming the windows of the smoke-room, nor the thin sleet that had driven into his face as he walked up Pall Mall....

"...Of all the factors which make for catastrophe in criminal activity"— the doctor twitched his coat-tails, his fine head drooped sideways as it invariably did when he grew dogmatic—"there is none so potent as the factor of emotion. Passion in all its forms— anger, love, hate, sentimentality— disastrous! Twelve months ago this week I prosecuted a butler of mine. He had been stealing systematically— sleeve-links, a case of wine, a little silver— a good fellow, and he had been with me eight years. He had a wife and child. They died when he was in prison, which was unfortunate— terribly unfortunate, poor man. A week ago I had a letter from him telling me that sooner or later he would hang for me. The letter was almost incoherent; he wrote in a fury. I have not even troubled to put the letter in the hands of the police. His anger is my safeguard. Had he not written I should have been worried, for I knew that he had been released from prison; an angry enemy is half disarmed. In a month's time I shall receive another letter apologizing for the first and asking for my good offices to secure a situation for him; in six months he will have married again and will write thanking me for all I have done for him. Tanner is typical—"

Dr. Lansen's limousine was waiting as he conducted his guest down the broad marble stairs to the murky street. Underfoot was half an inch of greasy snow; the fog swirled in clouds along Pall Mall, and though the journey to Park

Lane, where he had his apartment, was a short one, Rewen was shivering by the time they arrived.

"A beastly climate," chuckled the doctor, unlocking the door of his flat, "and I can understand that you are pining for the beaches of Durban— or is it Muizenberg? Personally, I love the mystery and furtiveness of fog." The big library-study was furnished with a luxury which seemed to err on the side of effeminacy; but then, George Rewen carried the advertisement of his out-of-door life in his tanned face and lean, loose frame.

He loathed financiers as a rule, but was compelled to admit that Dr. Lansen was a notable exception to the general run of the species. A financier who had other interests than money was something of a novelty.

"When does your steamer leave?" Lansen asked, as he pressed the bell on his desk.

"January 3rd," said Rewen. "At least, I hope I can finish my business in time to catch the mail-boat."

A liveried manservant came in; Dr. Lansen ordered cocktails.

"I hope so," he said, when the man had gone. "Lady Mary is rather difficult. She is young, and young people *can* be difficult. A year ago I could have sold the property and saved you the journey perhaps. But she is of age, and before the claims can be transferred her signature is necessary."

"Are there any other trustees?"

The doctor shook his head.

"No— I have the sole responsibility. I am seeing her to-night. I do not anticipate any very great opposition."

iii

OVER the cocktails George Rewen learnt something of the doctor and the genesis of his fortune. He had been a general practitioner in a county town till the death of a grateful patient had placed him in possession of a modest fortune. This had been augmented by another legacy soon after he had set up in Harley Street as a specialist on nervous disorders.

The late Earl of Landring had been his friend and patient, and had left him a considerable sum, in addition to the trusteeship of his estate, which included two hundred apparently worthless gold claims in the Leydenburg district of the Transvaal. On these he had paid taxation for ten years before a boring on a neighbouring gold farm had revealed a rich low-level reef. The purchase of these claims was the business which had brought George Rewen to England.

"She had some absurd idea that there should be no further sale of property until the term of my trusteeship expires, which is another eleven months," said Lansen, sipping thoughtfully at his cocktail.

Rewen smiled.

"I hope she will change her mind," he said. "We wish to get the company floated this year whilst the market is healthy. I think that in offering a hundred thousand we are offering top price."

He went back to his hotel after dinner, a little puzzled. For a shrewd financier, the doctor had peculiar views on the value of mining propositions. He had cross-examined his guest upon the future of half a dozen African properties which Rewen knew to be hopelessly insolvent, and in which, apparently, Lansen had invested. To describe them as wild-cat schemes would be to suggest that wild cats were gentle and domesticated creatures.

He had been an investor in the Marandalas Platinum Company— the most palpable swindle that had ever been put upon the market. Rewen had a banker friend in London, and, late as the hour was, he rang up the banker at his Sunningdale residence.

"Lansen? Oh, yes, a gambler, but immensely rich. Everything he touches turns to gold— eventually. A very lucky man and a most convincing talker."

At the moment this testimonial was being offered to his power of persuasion, Dr. Lansen was in some doubts as to his gifts in this respect. He was standing in his favourite position, his back to a fireplace in a Grosvenor Square house, and his argument awakened no enthusiasm in his unresponsive audience.

Lady Mary Elfort sat in a corner of the big settee, turning and turning the diamond bracelet on her arm, and appeared to be so absorbed in her occupation that she did not raise her eyes to the doctor once. She had come in from a theatre, and her ermine cloak lay over one arm of the settee.

"I know— I am awfully sorry I am so obstinate, but I don’t see the need for hurry. We’ve sold such an awful lot this year— the Bennett estate and the Clearhaven property. I feel I ought to— see somebody— couldn’t I consult Mr. Strangeway?"

Dr. Lansen smiled. Another man would have grown frantic at the suggestion. Strangeway was a lawyer, and, until the days of his trusteeship, the family lawyer, and Strangeway did not like him.

"My dear Mary"— his voice was very gentle—"that is rather offensive, isn’t it? I am doing my best for you— it is no profit to me. This man Rewen understands the mining market and was very emphatic; he said the value of the claims may be sensibly reduced next year—"

"How can they be?"

"It is a question of the money market." Lansen was very patient; it was as though he were pointing out to a naughty child the error of her ways. "Money just now is free; next year it may be tight."

"Could I see Mr. Rewen?" she asked, and the doctor hesitated.

"Certainly. I was going to suggest that."

He thought so quickly that she might not guess how in the brief space of the pause between speech and speech he had planned and revised his plan.

"He is coming down to lunch with me at 'Sea Castle'. Let me drive you down to-morrow."

She had visited Dr. Lansen's old house before— a pleasant, if lonely, place on the Thanet coast— in summer.

Mary Elfort had few relations, and most of them had been antagonized by her erratic father, who had a penchant for quarrelling with his relatives.

"Yes— but it won't be a pleasant drive, will it?" she asked. "It is snowing now?"

Dr. Lansen smiled.

"You are too young to think of such old-fashioned things as the weather," he said.

When he reached Park Lane he experienced an unpleasant shock. Save for the swift passage of occasioned motor-buses, the thoroughfare was deserted. The man who came towards him from the shadows might be an innocent wayfarer: on the other hand ... Dr. Lansen's slipped his hand into his overcoat pocket, and wished he had told his chauffeur to wait until he had opened the outer door of the building in which he had his flat.

"Good evening, Doctor."

It was Tanner. Tanner, the gaolbird, and the utterer of dire threats. But his voice was civil and his tone without offence.

"What do you want, Tanner?"

The doctor's hand closed over the stock of his Browning; he thumbed down the safety-catch. It seemed to him at that moment that Tanner knew he carried a gun.

"Could you do anything for me, Doctor? I'm down and out."

Lansen smiled; he could have wished that his audience at Brown's Club were there to witness this rapid endorsement of his prophecy. And then he thought....

"Come up, Tanner."

He let the man walk first.

In the setting of a beautiful room Tanner looked unwholesome. He had not shaved. His clothes were shabby and weather-stained. There was no resemblance here to a pompous and dishonest butler.

"Would you like to go down to Sea Castle and open up the house? I shall only be there for a day or two."

The man stared at him. Had the psychologist in Dr. Lansen been at its brightest he might have read in that stare the fulfilment of crazy dreams.

"Yes, sir— you don't usually go down to Sea Castle in the winter "

The doctor nodded.

"Exactly. I have a reason for wishing that my visit should not be advertised now. It is rather a private — er— business."

He sent Tanner away with certain keys and money. Curious, mused Dr. Lansen, that a man who had suffered imprisonment, justly, and who could ascribe the loss of a wife and child to him, could be so meek. Tanner's appearance was in every way providential.

iv

DR. LANSEN did not go to bed that night; he sat up packing necessary clothing and destroying papers. It would be hard to take a final farewell of this pleasant flat. The last of the papers to go into the fire and add to the ashes which overflowed on to the hearth were six Writs of Summons issued that very day by certain rapacious stockbrokers who had acted in concert, or had been moved by a common instinct of self-preservation.

The salvage of two estates for which he had acted as trustee was in a wall-safe: three thick wads of Swiss banknotes, each for a thousand francs.

An unintelligent criminal, thought Dr. Lansen, would have waited until people began to whisper, and court messengers deposited orders of garnishee upon the tables of bank messengers. He was not unintelligent. Also at the Kantonal Bank at Montreux was a large balance ... foresight— organization— the executive brain....

Early the next morning, George Rewen received an express letter:

Lady Mary has ceased to be difficult [it ran]. *She is staying with me at my place near Whitstable. Will you come down and join my house-party for Christmas? On one point her ladyship is childishly insistent— the money must be paid in dollar currency! She has, apparently, some notion that sterling will slump as a result of the strike. She may be right, but it is a little wearying to deal with youthful mentalities. I am afraid we must humour her.*

There were elaborate directions as to how "Sea Castle" should be reached by road. George Rewen had hired a big Spanz coupe for his use whilst he was in London; the doctor had been his guarantor to the hiring company.

George scratched his chin thoughtfully; he consulted the bank where his money was deposited. The bank manager was quietly amused, but offered only the conventional objections and expressed a willingness to insure the currency in transit. He knew the doctor was slightly acquainted with Lady Mary and was aware that she was "difficult"— he had had this impression from Dr. Lansen.

With the greater part of five hundred thousand dollars in his pocket George Rewen drove out of London with a light heart, for the letter had put a period to his stay in a very unpleasant climate.

He found himself thinking about the park girl as he drove through Lewisham, had a little pang of regret that a promising acquaintance could not be renewed. A skid on the greasy tramlines put her out of his mind. It had been snowing for three days intermittently in the country, he learned at Dartford. Snow is a breath-taking decoration on the branches of cedars and the roofs of old cottages; it brings a ghostly silence to the countryside and a new value of loveliness to the ugly corners of the world. But to a man who has a large car suffering from a fractured water-joint its aesthetic qualities are not so obvious.

Night was coming down with the fine, powdery snow when George Rewen switched on his lamps and took one long and gloomy look at the newly formed pool of ice beneath his radiator, and began his tramp in search of the inevitable garage. He rather wished he was not carrying nearly half a million dollars in currency. It had been an inspiration to follow the secondary road to Whitstable; such inspirations are of the devil. Normally the depth of snow on the road was about twelve inches, but it was a track exposed to all the winds that blew, and he was knee-deep in drifts every few yards. To his left a flat marsh extending, as he guessed, to the grey sea; to his right a featureless plain, though he had seen straggling lines of trees before the water-joint went.

"Phe-e-e-w!"

Gale *and* snow. He grinned mirthlessly, and felt in his pocket to be sure that his electric lamp was there.

He resented many things, but none so much as the romance of being snowbound on Christmas Eve. Such things only happened in sugary stories; he was not romantic. He was a very wholesome bachelor who had made money by developing mines and buying and selling stock. He thought lovingly of Tanganyika Concessions and East Rands. It was warm and sunny in Johannesburg, and the plumbago would be burning bluely in a hundred gardens, and the children playing in Joubert Park; in Tanganyika, too ... there was a whole lot of fun to be got round Tanganyika, shooting....

"Phe-e-e-w!"

He stopped, gasping. The wind was blowing all ways; in an instant his face had been masked with snow.

Then, to add to the grotesqueness of everything, there was a sudden quiver of blinding light and the crash and roll of thunder.

"Snow-storms *and* lightning! Heavens, what a country!" he growled.

V

IT was growing dark with extraordinary rapidity. He looked back, wondering if he could see the lights of his car, but the falling flakes dropped a thick and impenetrable curtain. Whether he were on or off the road, he could only guess.

Snow-billows, which might hide the scrubby hedges, stretched away into the dusk. He plodded on— and on. Sometimes the wind was behind him, sometimes at his flank. Once he nearly slipped down the steep bank of a water-channel. It was then that he knew he was not on the road. A rift occurred in the invisible clouds, and it became a little lighter; ahead or behind, he heard the distant rumble of thunder.

He stopped and looked down. To call them footprints would have been inaccurate. But there were certain deep little pats in the snow, similar to those which he had been creating as he walked; they occurred at regular intervals and followed a snow-furrow that ran at right angles to his own track. And they were new. The fine snow had not filled them as it would in a few minutes, for the wind had momentarily dropped and the white, powdery stuff was falling straightly. The visible impress of heel and toe would have told him the direction, but no sign of a boot-sole showed. Stooping, he peered down first into one and then into another of the depressions. Here was a place where the unknown foot had slipped, ploughing a white channel.

He turned left, stamping knee-deep, his eyes on the snow— white no longer, but purple in the failing light.

He was moving in the right direction— if his guide was right. A half-buried sapling appeared from the fog, another— a dwarf of a tree like a shrivelled old man crouching painfully— a pine on his left, and then the indescribable scent of a wood. There was more and more shelter; the snow under his feet became a crust so thin that he could feel the solid earth beneath. And the little pits had become footmarks— a woman's; a fashionably shod woman— the soles were narrow and pointed, the heels high. He had scarcely made the discovery before he saw a dark, shapeless bundle, almost at his feet. It was oddly like a bear cub, the fur speckled thickly with snow, but he knew it was human before he knelt by its side, and a woman before his nostrils were flattered by the faint fragrance of a perfume beyond his power to classify.

He was less interested in the identity of his find, its sex or age, than in the dismal realization of his own helplessness. There was some sort of shelter here, for the trees were massing; there were some so protected from the storm that only a powder of snow showed on their trunks. He tried to lift her and was surprised at her weight. He had always thought of women rather as ethereal beings to be supported on one strong arm and defended with another.

Standing astride of her, like a pair of human shear-legs, he lifted her till his shoulder was at her waist level; then, heaving her up, he staggered on, he hoped, to complete shelter.

Unexpectedly it showed out of the darkness, a square wood-shed of a place with a rough door held in position by a hasp and wooden peg. Setting down his burden, he opened the door and flashed his lamp around. The tiny shed was

empty, except for a lawn-mower and a tin lantern that hung on a nail to the scantling rafter. A grimy lantern, but it held a candle, and this he lit before he returned to the doubled heap he had left at the door.

Unconsciously he had applied the perfect remedy to a fainting woman, for he had left her with her head drooping in her lap.

"Who is that?"

Her voice was husky with fear as she stared up at the shape that had detached itself from the gloomy doorway.

"I found you in the snow. Fainted, I guess."

"Oh!"

She tried to get to her feet unaided; she was too weak, and accepted the cold hand that was extended to her.

"It is snowing worse than ever. This place seems warm— it may even be dry. Watch your step."

A circle of light from his hand-lamp guided her and she reached the interior. The candle was burning gallantly, somewhat handicapped by the dust that obscured its glass case; he took out a sodden handkerchief and left the glass streaky, but translucent.

"I don't know where we are. I've got a car somewhere on the Whitstable road. If I knew where the Whitstable road was, I'd go back and bring the rug—"

He stopped open-mouthed. She was leaning against the wall, her white face turned to his. The heavy mink coat was open; underneath she wore a dark cloth dress— the pearls about her whiter throat were worth a rich man's annual income; on her dress quivered a diamond pendant that flashed back all the colours of the spectrum. He was conscious only of eyes— great dark eyes, wide and staring.

"Will you come back to the house with me— I think I ought to go back— it was silly— running away. I think I ought to go back."

Her speech was strangely deliberate; he remembered a hypnotic stance conducted by a fakir in— where was it? Anyway, the lured subject talked just like that, and nodded wisely as she was nodding.

"Where is your house?" he asked, and she turned her head and looked out through the open door.

"Somewhere— near."

She lifted her hand and peered down at it; it was an odd, mad little gesture. She had done it before.

"Are you hurt?"

He took her hand in his; it was blue with cold, icy to the touch. There was no injury except two tiny punctures at the wrist— blue-red specks in a discoloured circle.

"I think I've met you before," he said gently. "I saw you in the Green Park— wasn't it yesterday morning? "

"I don't know— perhaps. Rather a nice man who talked about— Africa."

It was she— the park girl. As she stumbled towards the door, he put his arm about her waist, supporting her, and she did not resist.

"You can't go " he began, when he saw a light coming through the trees. It was a very powerful light — a spirit-gas lamp that swung as its owner walked.

"Hello!" shouted George Rewen. Dr. Lansen's jovial voice answered him.

"Where the deuce have you been? I've been expecting you for hours, my dear fellow. Lady Mary is here, and everything is signed and sealed "

He stopped; only then did he see the girl shrinking to Rewen's side.

"Oh— I see you've met. My poor little girl has had rather a bad nervous breakdown."

The doctor was a very quick thinker.

"Come along, Mary, my dear," he said briskly.

"Is this Lady Mary? I can look after her. Will you lead the way?"

Rewen's voice had the quality of ice, and Lansen said nothing to him, but turned and went slowly back the way he had come, the two following him.

"Don't let him— touch me!"

The words were no more than breathed, yet as Rewen nodded the doctor looked round.

"Of course, she's talking utter nonsense," he said. "These modern young women are liable to such attacks. I wonder it hasn't come sooner."

George Rewen did not answer.

The house was very near, a squat, rambling cottage built on the crumbling walls of that famous Sea Castle which had braved the gales for four hundred years.

The doctor passed under the portico into the big hall. There was evidence here that the house had been untenanted for some time— a musty smell, thick dust on the hall table. The drawing-room was an ocean of gloom in which the sheeted furniture stood up like lonely little islands.

"Your house-party doesn't seem to have arrived?"

Dr. Lansen smiled.

"No— they are coming to-morrow. Will you excuse me?"

He was gone before excuse could be accepted.

vi

IN the stone kitchen at the back of the house the unshaven Tanner sat at the table munching a piece of bread. There was an opened bottle of wine before him.

"You can go back, Tanner; here is fifty pounds. Call at my place in about a week's time and I may be able to do something for you."

The man nodded but did not touch the money.

"Does the young lady know I am here?" he asked.

"Even I do not know you're here." Dr. Lansen was in a flippant mood. "Take the path over the fields— you can find your way, and the main road is good walking."

"Somebody has taken off that cover of the well, sir," said Tanner.

"That I know," said Dr. Lansen testily. "I have been taking a sample of the water."

Tanner nodded again and rose. This time he took up the money.

'I'll be going in five minutes," he said, and felt in his pocket for a piece of cord that he had been tying slipknot fashion.

Dr. Lansen returned to the drawing-room without misgivings. He stopped at the door and took from his pocket a long envelope, from this a paper.

"Is she feeling better?" he asked as he came into the room.

Mary was lying on a sheeted sofa, and turned her pale face towards him. Behind the sofa was George Rewen, leaning on the back. He was so obviously on his defence that the psychologist realized that he was to be saved a great deal of unnecessary explanation.

Nevertheless:

"I have the transfer properly signed and the receipt," he said. "You have, I understand, the money—"

Rewen shook his head.

"There will be no deal," he said quietly. "Lady Mary has been drugged and is still under its influence, as she was when she signed the transfer."

"The money," said Dr. Lansen firmly.

The barrel of a Browning he held rested on the back of a chair, and its muzzle covered the man.

"Give it to me nicely and take your receipt. I shall shoot if you don't, and take it from you."

"Let him have it, please."

The girl spoke quietly; there was no tremor in her voice.

"I once called you unintelligent— I'm sorry," murmured Lansen as he reached for the package.

"Thank you. I rather wondered if you would carry a pistol; it was foolish not to take that precaution."

He backed out into the passage, listening. The sound of shuffling footsteps on the stone floor of the kitchen reached him, the squeak of rusty bolts, and, after an interval, the slam of a door. How characteristic of Tanner to leave by the servants' entrance I

"It will be from five to ten days before the evidence of this unfortunate happening is discovered," he said pleasantly, "and it may interest you to know that I have precipitated this crisis because of certain private information which came to me yesterday. One of the danger spots to me is the Home Office. There is a temporary messenger at the Home Office who has been my guardian angel. It was from him I learnt that permission had been granted to exhume the body of a former patient— a patient who left me quite a lot of money!"

He smiled waggishly.

"You may not see the connection? I am going to tell you something, Mr. Rewen— it is probably the last piece of knowledge you will gain in this world. The true criminal— as I believe myself to be— prepares himself to meet all contingencies." He looked at the Browning in his hand. "Very near to this house is a large deep well— very, very deep."

Why was he talking at such lengths? Rewen puzzled — and guessed.

Somebody had left— Lansen was waiting until that somebody was out of earshot. He looked down at the girl and smiled, and she smiled back at him. And then their hands met in a grip that brought courage to both.

The doctor had stopped talking.

Looking up, Rewen saw that the doorway was empty. He heard no sound. There was a high-backed chair near to his hand and this he lifted. Once he had defended himself against Mashona assegais with a lighter chair than this. It would be poor protection against the shattering thresh of bullets, but it was something.

He reached the wall flush with the door and listened— no sound. He flung the chair into the hall to divert the lurking assassin and followed instantly. The hall was empty; on the floor lay a thick package, the money he had brought and which Lansen had held in his hand. Near by was a folded carpet, and on top of this was a pistol. It was as if pistol and money had been dropped together.

With the gun in his hand, Rewen went swiftly along the passage, but his progress was arrested by a locked door. He thought he heard a sound and listened. There was no need to risk the girl's life by any further exploration. He went back to her and told her of his surprising discoveries.

"We'll get out. Lansen's lantern is still in the hall, and we'll have to take the risk of being potted— it may be a trap, but it doesn't look like it."

The Browning was loaded, he found on examination, and, with the girl carrying the lantern, they went out into the night.

Tanner, the butler, who knew nothing of the psychology of criminals, but only knew that he once had a wife and child, waited until the light had vanished before he loosened the cord about a dead man's neck and pushed the body of the eminent psychologist into a well which was reputedly bottomless.

GEORGE REWEN sent a cable to his partner in Johannesburg:

AM POSTPONING DEPARTURE TWO MONTHS, PERHAPS THREE. LADY MARY THINKS ACCOMPANYING ME TO CAPE IN MAY TO SEE PROPERTY.

"Who's Lady Mary?" snarled his overworked partner. "And why doesn't he tell us what he's done about those damn' claims? Boy— get me a cable-blank!"

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8: The Shadows

Henry S. Whitehead

1882-1932

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I DID NOT BEGIN to see the shadows until I had lived in Old Morris' house for more than a week. Old Morris, dead and gone these many years, had been the scion of a still earlier Irish settler in Santa Cruz, of a family which had come into the island when the Danes, failing to colonize its rich acres, had opened it, in the middle of the Eighteenth Century, to colonists; and younger sons of Irish, Scottish, and English gentry had taken up sugar estates and commenced that baronial life which lasted for a century and which declined after the abolition of slavery and the German bounty on beet sugar had started the long process of West Indian commercial decadence. Mr. Morris' youth had been spent in the French islands.

The shadows were at first so vague that I attributed them wholly to the slight weakness which began to affect my eyes in early childhood, and which, while never materially interfering with the enjoyment of life in general, had necessitated the use of glasses when I used my eyes to read or write. My first experience of them was about one o'clock in the morning. I had been at a "Gentlemen's Party" at Hacker's house, "Emerald," as some poetic-minded ancestor of Hacker's had named the family estate three miles out of Christiansted, the northerly town, built on the site of the ancient abandoned French town of Bassin.

I had come home from the party and was undressing in my bedroom, which is one of two rooms on the westerly side of the house which stands at the edge of the old "Sunday Market." These two bedrooms open on the market-place, and I had chosen them, rather than the more airy rooms on the other side, because of the space outside. I like to look out on trees in the early mornings, whenever possible, and the ancient market-place is overshadowed with the foliage of hundred-year-old mahogany trees, and a few gnarled "otaheites" and Chinese-bean trees.

I had nearly finished undressing, had noted that my servant had let down and properly fastened the mosquito netting, and had stepped into the other bedroom to open the jalousies so that I might get as much of the night-breeze as possible circulating through the house. I was coming back through the doorway between the two bedrooms, and taking off my dressing gown, at the moment, when the first faint perception of what I have called "the shadows" made itself apparent. It was very dark, just after switching off the electric light in that front bedroom. I had, in fact, to feel for the doorway. In this I experienced some difficulty, and my eyes had not fully adjusted themselves to the thin

starlight seeping in through the slanted jalousies of my own room when I passed through the doorway and groped my way toward the great mahogany four-poster in which I was about to lie down for my belated rest.

I saw the nearest post looming before me, closer than I had expected. Putting out my hand, I grasped— nothing. I winked in some surprize, and peered through the slightly increasing light, as my eyes adjusted themselves to the sudden change. Yes, surely— there was the corner of the bedstead just in front of my face! By now my eyes were sufficiently attuned to the amount of light from outside to see a little plainer. I was puzzled. The bed was not where I had supposed it to be. What could have happened? That the servants should have moved my bed without orders to do so was incredible. Besides, I had undressed, in full electric light in that room, not more than a few minutes ago, and then the bed was standing exactly where it had been since I had had it moved into that room a week before. I kicked gently, before me with a slippered foot, against the place where that bedpost appeared to be standing— and my foot met no resistance.

I stepped over to the light in my own room and snapped the button. In the sudden glare, everything readjusted itself to normal. There stood my bed, and here in their accustomed places about the room were ranged the chairs, the polished wardrobe (we do not use cupboards in the West India Islands), the mahogany dressing table— even my clothes which I had hung over a chair where Albertina my servant would find them in the morning and put them (they were of white drill) into the soiled-clothes bag in the morning.

I shook my head. Light and shadow in these islands seem, somehow, different from what they are like at home in the United States! The tricks they play are different tricks, somehow.

I snapped off the light again, and in the ensuing dead blackness, I crawled in under the loose edge of the mosquito netting, tucked it along under the edge of the mattress on that side, adjusted my pil!ows and the sheets, and settled myself for a good sleep. Even to a moderate man, these gentlemen's parties are rather wearing sometimes. They invariably last too long. I closed my eyes and was asleep before I could have put these last ideas into words.

In the morning the recollection Of the experience with the bed-being-in-the-wrong-place was gone. I jumped out of bed and into my shower bath at half-past six, for I had promised O'Brien, captain of the U. S. Marines, to go out with him to the rifle range at La Grande Princesse that morning and look over the butts with him. I like O'Brien, and I am not uninterested in the efficiency of Uncle Sam's Marines, but my chief objective was to watch the pelicans. Out there on the glorious beach of Estate Grande Princesse ("Big Princess" as the Black People call it), a colony of pelicans snake their home, and it is a never-ending source of amusement to me to watch them fish. A Caribbean pelican is

probably the most graceful flier we have in these latitudes— barring not even the hurricane bird, that describer of noble arcs and parabolas,-and the most insanely, absurdly awkward creature on land that Providence has cared in a light-hearted moment to create!

I expressed my interest in Captain O'Brien's latest improvements, and while he was talking shop to one of his lieutenants and half a dozen enlisted men he has camped out there. I slipped down to the beach to watch the pelicans fish. Three or four of them were describing curves and turns of indescribable complexity and perfect grace over the green water of the reef-enclosed white beach. Ever and again one would stop short in the air, fold himself up like a jackknife, turn head downward, his great pouched bill extended like the head of a cruel spear, and drop like a plummet into the water, emerging an instant later with the pouch distended with a fish.

I stayed a trifle too long— for my eyes. Driving back I observed that I had picked up several sun-spots, and when I arrived home I polished a set of yellowish sun-spectacles I keep for such emergencies and put them on.

The east side of the house had been shaded against the pouring morning sunlight, and in this double shade I looked to see my eyes clear up. The sun-spots persisted, however, in that annoying, recurrent way they have, almost disappearing and then returning in undiminished kaleidoscopic grotesqueness— those strange blocks and parcels of pure color changing as one winks from indigo to brown and from brown to orange and then to a blinding turquoise-blue, according to some eery natural law of physics, within the fluids of the eye itself.

The sun-spots were so persistent that morning that I decided to keep my eyes closed for some considerable time and see if that would allow them to run their course and wear themselves out. Blue and mauve grotesques of the vague, general shape of diving pelicans swam and jumped inside my eyes. It was very annoying. I called to Albertina.

"Albertina," said I, when she had come to the door, "please go into my bedroom and close all the jalousies tight. Keep out all the light you can, please."

"Ahl roight, sir," replied the obedient Albertina, and I heard her slapping the jalousie-blinds together with sharp little clicks.

"De jalousie ahl close, sir," reported Albertina. I thanked her, and proceeded with half-shut eyes into the bedroom, which, not yet invaded with afternoon's sunlight and closely shuttered, offered an appearance of deep twilight. I lay, face down, across the bed, a pillow under my face, and my eyes buried in darkness.

Very gradually, the diving pelican faded out, to a cube, to a dim, recurrent blur, to nothingness. I raised my head and rolled over on my side, placing the pillow back where it belonged. And as I opened my eyes on the dim room, there

stood, in faint, shadowy outline, in the opposite corner of the room, away from the outside wall on the market-place side, the huge, Danish bedstead I had vaguely noted the night before, or rather, early that morning.

It was the most curious sensation, looking at that bed in the dimness of the room. I was reminded of those fourth-dimensional tales which are so popular nowadays, for the bed impinged, spatially, on my large bureau, and the curious thing was that I could see the bureau at the same time! I rubbed my eyes, a little unwisely, but not enough to bring back the pelican sun-spots into them, for I remembered and desisted pretty promptly. I looked, fixedly, at the great bed, and it blurred and dimmed and faded out of my vision.

Again, I was greatly puzzled, and I went over to where it seemed to stand and walked through it— it being no longer visible to my now restored vision, free of the effects of the sun-spots— and then I went out into the "hall"— a West Indian drawing room is called "the hall"— and sat down to think over this strange phenomenon. I could not account for it. If it had been poor Prentice, now! Prentice attended all the "gentlemen's parties" to which he was invited with a kind of religious regularity, and had to be helped into his car with a similar regularity, a regularity which was verging on the monotonous nowadays, as the invitations became more and more strained. No— in my case it was not the effects of strong liquors, for barring an occasional sociable swizzel I retained here in my West Indian residence my American convictions that moderation in such matters was a reasonable virtue. I reasoned out the matter of the phantom bedstead— for so I was already thinking of lt— as far as I was able. That it was a phantom of defective eyesight I had no reasonable doubt. I had had my eyes examined in New York three months before, and the oculist pleased me greatly by assuring me that there were no visible indications of deterioration. In fact, Dr. Jusserand had said at that time that my eyes were stronger, sounder, than when he had made his last examination six months before.

Perhaps this conviction— that the appearance was due to my own physical shortcoming— accounts for the fact I was not (what shall I say?) disturbed, by what I saw, or thought I saw. Confront the most thoroughgoing materialist with a ghost, and he will act precisely like anyone else; like any normal human being who believes in the material world as the outward and visible sign of something which animates it. All normal human beings, it seems to me, are sacramentalists!

I was, for this reason, able to thing clearly about the phenomenon. My mind was not clouded and bemused with fear, and its known physiological effects. I can, quite easily, record what I "saw" in the course of the next few days. The bed was clearer to my vision and apprehension than it had been. It seemed to have grown in visibility; in a kind of substantialness, if there is such a word! It appeared more material than it had before, less shadowy.

I looked about the room and saw other furniture: a huge, old-fashioned mahogany bureau with men's heads carved on the knuckles of the front legs, Danish fashion. There is precisely such carving on pieces in the museum in Copenhagen, they tell me, those who have seen my drawing of it. I was actually able to do that, and had completed a kind of plan-picture of the room, putting in all the shadow-furniture, and leaving my own, actual furniture out. Thank the God in whom I devoutly believe— and know to be more powerful than the Powers of Evil— I was able to finish that rather elaborate drawing before… Well, I must not "run ahead of my story."

That night when I was ready to retire, and had once more opened up the jalousies of the front bedroom, and had switched off the light, I looked, naturally enough under the circumstances, for the outlines of that ghostly furniture. They were much clearer now. I studied them with a certain sense of almost "scientific" detachment. It was, even then, apparent to me that no weakness of the strange complexity which is the human eye could reasonably account for the presence of a well-defined set of mahogany furniture in a room already furnished with real furniture! But I was by now sufficiently accustomed to it to be able to examine it all without that always-disturbing element of fear— strangeness. I looked at the bedstead and the "roll-back" chairs, and the great bureau, and a ghostly, huge, and quaintly carved wardrobe, studying their outlines, noting their relative positions. It was on that occasion that it occurred to me that it would be of interest to make some kind of drawing of them. I looked the harder after that, fixing the details and the relations of them all in my mind, and then I went into the hall and got some paper and a pencil and set to work.

It was hard work, this of reproducing something which I was well aware was some kind of an "apparition," especially after looking at the furniture in the dark bedroom, switching on the light in another room and then trying to reproduce. I could not, of course, make a direct comparison. I mean it was impossible to look at my drawing and then look at the furniture. There was always a necessary interval between the two processes. I persisted through several evenings, and even for a couple of evenings fell into the custom of going into my bedroom in the evening's darkness, looking at what was there, and then attempting to reproduce it. After five or six days, I had a fair plan, in considerable detail, of the arrangement of this strange furniture in my bedroom,-a plan or drawing which would be recognizable if there were anyone now alive who remembered such arrangement of such furniture. It will be apparent that a story had been growing up in my mind, or, at least, that I had come to some kind of conviction that what I "saw" was a reproduction of something that had once existed in that same detail and that precise order!

On the seventh night, there came an interruption.

I had, by that time, finished my work, pretty well. I had drawn the room as it would have looked with that furniture in it, and had gone over the whole with India ink, very carefully. As a drawing, the thing was finished, so far as my indifferent skill as a draftsman would permit.

That seventh evening, I was looking over the appearance of the room, such qualms as the eeriness of the situation might have otherwise produced reduced to next-to-nothing partly by my interest, in part by having become accustomed to it all. I was making, this evening, as careful a comparison as possible between my remembered work on paper and the detailed appearance of the room. By now, the furniture stood out clearly, in a kind of light of its own which I can roughly compare only to "phosphorescence." It was not, quite, that. But that will serve, lame as it is, and trite perhaps, to indicate what I mean. I suppose the appearance of the room was something like what a cat "sees" when she arches her back— as Algernon Blackwood has pointed out, in *John Silence*— and rubs against the imaginary legs of some personage entirely invisible to the man in the armchair who idly wonders what has taken possession of his house-pet.

I was, as I say, studying the detail. I could not find that I had left out anything salient. The detail was, too, quite clear now. There were no blurred outlines as there had been on the first few nights. My own, material furniture had, so to speak, sunk back into invisibility, which was sensible enough, seeing that I had put the room in as nearly perfect darkness as I could, and there was no moon to interfere, those nights.

I had run my eyes all around it, up and down the twisted legs of the great bureau, along the carved ornamentation of the top of the wardrobe, along the lines of the chairs, and come back to the bed. It was at this point of my checking-up that I got what I must describe as the first "shock" of the entire experience.

Something moved, beside the bed.

I peered, carefully, straining my eyes to catch what it might be. It had been something bulky, a slow-moving object, on the far side of the bed, blurred, somewhat, just as the original outlines had been blurred in the beginning of my week's experience. The now strong and clear outlines of the bed, and what I might describe as its ethereal substance, stood between me and it. Besides, the vision of the slow-moving mass was further obscured by a ghostly mosquito-net, which had been one of the last of the details to come into the scope of my strange night-vision.

Those folds of the mosquito-netting moved— waved, before my eyes.

Someone, it might almost be imagined, was getting into that bed!

I sat, petrified. This was a bit too much for me. I could feel the little chills run up and down my spine. My scalp prickled. I put my hands on my knees, and pressed hard. I drew several deep breaths. "All-overish" is an old New England expression, once much used by spinsters, I believe, resident in that intellectual

section of the United States. Whatever the precise connotation of the term, that was way I felt. I could feel the reactive sensation, I mean, of that particular portion of the whole experience, in every part of my being— body, mind, and soul! It was— paralyzing. I reached up a hand that was trembling violently— I could barely control it, and the fingers, when they touched the hard-rubber button, felt numb— and switched on the bedroom light, and spent the next ten minutes recovering.

That night, when I came to retire, I dreaded— actually dreaded— what might come to my vision when I snapped off the light. This, however, I managed to reason out with myself. I used several arguments— nothing had so far occurred to annoy or injure me; if this were to be a cumulative experience, if something were to be "revealed" to me by this deliberate process of slow materialization which had been progressing for the last week or so, then it might as well be for some good and useful purpose. I might be, in a sense, the agent of Providence! If it were otherwise; if it were the evil work of some discarnate spirit, or something of the sort, well, every Sunday since my childhood, in church, I had recited the Creed, and so admitted, along with the clergy and the rest of the congregation, that God our Father had created all things— visible and invisible! If it were this part of His creation at work, for any purpose, then He was stronger than they. I said a brief prayer before turning off that light, and put my trust in Him. It may appear to some a bit old-fashioned— even Victorian! But He does not change along with the current fashions of human thought about Him, and this "human thought," and "the modern mind," and all the rest of it, does not mean the vast, the overwhelming majority of people. It involves only a few dozen prideful "intellectuals" at best, or worst!

I switched off the light, and, already clearer, I saw what must have been Old Morris, getting into bed.

I had interviewed old Mr. Bonesteel, the chief government surveyor, a gentleman of parts and much experience, a West Indian born on this island. Mr. Bonesteel, in response to my guarded enquiries— for I had, of course, already suspected Old Morris; was not my house still called his?— had stated that he remembered Old Morris well, in his own remote youth. His description of that personage and this apparition tallied. This, undoubtedly, was Old Morris. That it was someone, was apparent. I felt, somehow, rather relieved to realize that it was he. I knew something about him, you see. Mr. Bonesteel had given me a good description and many anecdotes, quite freely, and as though he enjoyed being called on for information about one of the old-timers like Morris. He had been more reticent, guarded, in fact, when I pressed him for details of Morris' end. That there had been some obscurity— intentional or otherwise, I could never ascertain— about the old man, I had already known. Such casual enquiries as I had made on other occasions through natural interest in the person whose

name still clung to my house sixty years or more since he had lived in it, had never got me anywhere. I had only gathered what Mr. Bonesteel's more ample account corroborated: that Morris had been eccentric, in some ways, amusingly so. That he had been extraordinarily well-to-do. That he gave occasional large parties, which, contrary to the custom of the hospitable island of St. Croix, were always required to come to a conclusion well before midnight. Why, there was a story of Old Morris almost literally getting rid of a few reluctant guests by one device or another from these parties, a circumstance on which hinged several of the amusing anecdotes of that eccentric person!

Old Morris, as I knew, had not always lived on St. Croix. His youth had been spent in Martinique, in the then smaller and less important town of Fort-de-France. That, of course, was many years before the terrific calamity of the destruction of St. Pierre had taken place, by the eruption of Mt. Pelée. Old Morris, coming to St. Croix in young middle age— forty-five or thereabouts— had already been accounted a rich man. He had been engaged in no business. He was a planter, not a storekeeper, had no profession. Where he produced his affluence was one of the local mysteries. His age, it seemed, was the other.

"I suppose," Mr. Bonesteel had said, that Morris was nearer a hundred than ninety, when he— ah— died. I was a child of about eight at that time. I shall be seventy next August-month. That, you see, would be about sixty years ago, about 1861, or about the time your Civil War was beginning. Now my father has told me— he died when I was nineteen— that Old Morris looked exactly the same when he was a boy! Extraordinary. The Black People used to say—" Mr. Bonesteel fell silent, and his eyes had an old man's dim, far-away look.

"The Black People have some very strange beliefs, Mr. Bonesteel," said I, attempting to prompt him. "A good many of them I have heard about myself, and they interest me very much. What particular— "

Mr. Bonesteel turned his mild, blue eyes upon me, reflectively.

"You must drop in at my house one of these days, Mr. Stewart," said he, mildly. "I have some rare old rum that I'd be glad to have you sample, sir! There's not much of it on the island these days, since Uncle Sam turned his prohibition laws loose on us in 1922."

"Thank you very much indeed, Mr Bonesteel," I replied. "I shall take the first occasion to do so, sir; not that I care especially for 'old rum' except a spoonful in a cup of tea, or in pudding sauce, perhaps; but the pleasure of your company, sir, is always an inducement."

Mr. Bonesteel bowed to me gravely, and I returned his bow from where I satin his airy office in Government House.

"Would you object to mentioning what that 'belief' was, sir?"

A slightly pained expression replaced my old friend's look of hospitality.

"All that is a lot of foolishness!" said he, with something like asperity. He looked at me, contemplatively.

"Not that I believe in such things, you must understand. Still, a man sees a good many things in these islands, in a lifetime, you know! Well, the Black People—" Mr. Bonesteel looked apprehensively about him, as though reluctant to have one of his clerks overhear what he was about to say, and leaned toward me from his chair, lowering his voice to a whisper.

"They said— it was a remark here and a kind of hint there, you must understand; nothing definite— that Morris had interfered, down there in Martinique, with some of their queer doings— offended the Zombi— something of the kind; that Morris had made some kind of conditions— oh, it was very vague, and probably all mixed up!— you know, whereby he was to have a long life and all the money he wanted— something like that— and afterward…"

"Well, Mr. Stewart, you just ask somebody, sometime about Morris' death."

Not another word about Old Morris could I extract out of Mr. Bonesteel.

But of course he had me aroused. I tried Despard, who lives on the other end of the island, a man educated at the Sorbonne, and who knows, it is said, everything there is know about the island and its affairs.

It was much the same with Mr. Despard, who is an entirely different kind of person; younger, for one thing, my old friend the government surveyor.

Mr. Despard smiled, a kind of wry smile. "Old Morris!" said he, reflectively, and paused.

"Might I venture to ask— no offense, my dear sir!— why you wish to rake up such an old matter as Old Morris' death?"

I was a bit nonplused, I confess. Mr. Despard had been perfectly courteous, as he always is, but, somehow, I had not expected such an intervention on his part.

"Why," said I, "I should find it hard to tell you, precisely, Mr. Despard. It is not that I am averse to being frank in the face of such an inquiry as yours, sir. I was not aware that there was anything important— serious, as your tone implies— about that matter. Put it down to mere curiosity if you will, and answer or not, as you wish, sir."

I was, perhaps, a little nettled at this unexpected, and, as it then seemed to me, finicky obstruction being placed in my way. What could there be in such a case for this formal reticence— these verbal safe-guards? If it were a "jumbee" story, there was no importance to it. If otherwise, well, I might be regarded by Despard as a person of reasonable discretion. Perhaps Despard was some relative of Old Morris, and there was something a bit off-color about his death. That, too, might account for Mr. Bonesteel's reticence.

"By the way," I enquired, noting Despard's reticence, "might I ask another question, Mr. Despard?"

"Certainly, Mr. Stewart."

"I do not wish to impress you as idly or unduly curious, but— are you and Mr. Bonesteel related in any way?"

"No, sir. We are not related in any way at all, sir."

"Thank you, Mr. Despard," said I, and, bowing to each other after the fashion set here by the Danes, we parted.

I had not learned a thing about Old Morris' death. I went in to see Mrs. Heidenklang. Here, if anywhere, I should find out what was intriguing me.

Mrs. Heidenklang is an ancient Creole lady, relict of a prosperous storekeeper, who lives, surrounded by a certain state of her own, propped up in bed in an environment of a stupendous quantity of lacy things and gauzy ruffles. I did not intend to mention Old Morris to her, but only to get some information about the Zombi, if that should be possible.

I found the old lady, surrounded by her ruffles and lace things, in one of her good days. Her health has been precarious for twenty years!

It was not difficult to get her talking about the Zombi.

"Yes," said Mrs. Heidenklang, "it is extraordinary how the old beliefs and the old words cling in their minds! Why, Mr. Stewart, I was hearing about a trial in the police court a few days ago. One old Black woman had summoned another for abusive language. On the witness stand the complaining old woman said: 'She cahl me a wuthless ole Cartagene, sir!' Now, think of that! Carthage was destroyed 'way back in the days of Cato the Elder, you know, Mr. Stewart! The greatest town of all Africa. To be a Carthaginian meant to be a sea-robber— a pirate: that is, a thief. One old woman on this island, more than two thousand years afterward, wishes to call another a thief, and the word 'Cartagene' is the word she naturally uses! I suppose that has persisted on the West Coast and throughout all those village dialects in Africa without a break, all these centuries! The Zombi of the French islands? Yes, Mr. Stewart. There are some extraordinary beliefs. Why, perhaps you've heard mention made of Old Morris, Mr. Stewart. He used to live in your house, you know?"

I held my breath. Here was a possible trove. I nodded my head. I did not dare to speak!

"Well, Old Morris, you see, lived most of his earlier days in Martinique, and, it is said, he had a somewhat adventurous life there, Mr. Stewart. Just what he did or how he got himself involved, seems never to have been made clear, but— in some way, Mr. Stewart, the Black People believe Morris got himself involved with a very powerful 'Jumbee,' and that is where what I said about the persistence of ancient beliefs comes in. Look on that table there, among those photographs, Mr. Stewart. There! that's the place. I wish I were able to get up and assist you. These maids! Everything askew, I have no doubt! Do you observe

a kind of fish-headed thing, about as big as the palm of your hand? Yes! that is it!"

I found the "fish-headed thing" and carried it over to Mrs. Heidenklang, She took it in her hand and looked at it. It lacked a nose, but otherwise it was intact, a strange, uncouth-looking little godling, made of anciently-polished volcanic stone, with huge, protruding eyes, small, humanlike ears, and what must have been a nose like a Tortola jack-fish, or a black witch-bird, with its parrot beak.

"Now that," continued Mrs. Heidenklang, "is one of the very ancient household gods of the aborigines of Martinique, and you will observe the likeness in the idea to the Lares and Penates of your school-Latin days. Whether this is a lar or a penate, I can not tell," and the old lady paused to smile at her little joke, "but at any rate he is a representation of something very powerful— a fish-god of the Caribs. There's something Egyptian about the idea, too, I've always suspected; and, Mr. Stewart, a Carib or an Arawak Indian— there were both in these islands, you know— looked much like an ancient Egyptian; perhaps half like your Zuñi or Aztec Indians, and half Egyptian, would be a fair statement of his appearance. These fish-gods had men's bodies, you see, precisely like the hawk-headed and jackal-headed deities of ancient Egypt.

"It was one of those, the Black People say, with which Mr. Morris got himself mixed up— 'Gahd knows' as they say— how! And, Mr. Stewart, they say, his death was terrible! The particulars I've never heard, but my father knew, and he was sick for several days, after seeing Mr. Morris' body. Extraordlnary, Isn't it? And when are you coming this way again, Mr. Stewart? Do drop in and call on an old lady."

I felt that I was progressing.

The next time I saw Mr. Bonesteel, which was that very evening, I stopped him on the street and asked for a word with him.

"What was the date, or the approximate date, Mr. Bonesteel, of Mr. Morris' death? Could you recall that, sir?"

Mr. Bonesteel paused and considered.

"It was just before Christmas," said he. "I remember it not so much by Christmas as by the races, which always take place the day after Christmas. Morris had entered his sorrel mare Santurce, and, as he left no heirs, there was no one who 'owned' Santurce, and she had to be withdrawn from the races. It affected the betting very materially and a good many persons were annoyed about it, but there wasn't anything that could be done."

I thanked Mr. Bonesteel, and not without reason, for his answer had fitted into something that had been growing in my mind. Christmas was only eight days off. This drama of the furniture and Old Morris getting into bed, I thought (and not unnaturally, it seems to me), might be a kind of re-enactment of the tragedy of his death. If I had the courage to watch, night after night, I might be

relieved of the necessity of asking any questions. I might witness whatever had occurred, in some weird reproduction, engineered, God knows how!

For three nights now, I had seen the phenomenon of Morris getting into bed repeated, and each time it was clearer. I had sketched him into my drawing, a short, squat figure, rather stooped and fat, but possessed of a strange, gorillalike energy. His movements, as he walked toward the bed, seized the edge of the mosquito-netting and climbed in, were, somehow, full of power, which was the more apparent since these were ordinary motions. One could not help imagining that Old Morris would have been a tough customer to tackle, for all his alleged age!

This evening, at the hour when this phenomenon was accustomed to enact itself, that is, about eleven o'clock, I watched again. The scene was very much clearer, and I observed something I had not noticed before. Old Morris' simulacrum paused just before seizing the edge of the netting, raised its eyes, and began, with its right hand, a motion precisely like one who is about to sign himself with the cross. The motion was abruptly arrested, however, only the first of the four touches on the body being made.

I saw, too, something of the expression of the face that night, for the first time. At the moment of making the arrested sign, it was one of despairing horror. Immediately afterward, as this motion appeared to be abandoned for the abrupt clutching of the lower edge of the mosquito-net, it changed into a look of ferocious stubbornness, of almost savage self-confidence. I lost the facial expression as the appearance sank down upon the bed and pulled the ghostly bedclothes over itself.

Three nights later, when all this had become as greatly intensified as had the clearing-up process that had affected the furniture, I observed another motion, or what might be taken for the faint foreshadowing of another motion. This was not on the part of Old Morris. It made itself apparent as lightly and elusively as the swift flight of a moth across the reflection of a lamp, over near the bedroom door (the doors in my house are more than ten feet high, in fourteen-foot-high walls), a mere flicker of something— something entering the room. I looked, and peered at that corner, straining my eyes, but nothing could I see save what I might describe as an intensification of the black shadow in that corner near the door, vaguely formed like a slim human figure, though grossly out of all human proportion. The vague shadow looked purple against the black. It was about ten feet high, and otherwise as though cast by an incredibly tall, thin human being.

I made nothing of it then; and again, despite all this cumulative experience with the strange shadows of my bedroom, attributed this last phenomenon to my eyes. It was too vague to be at that time accounted otherwise than as a mere subjective effect.

But the night following, I watched for it at the proper moment in the sequence of Old Morris' movements as he got into bed, and this time it was distinctly clearer. The shadow, it was, of some monstrous shape, ten feet tall, long, angular, of vaguely human appearance, though even in its merely shadowed form, somehow cruelly, strangely inhuman! I can not describe the cold horror of its realization. The head-part was, relatively to the proportions of the body, short and broad, like a pumpkin head of a "man" made of sticks by boys, to frighten passers-by on Hallowe'en.

The next evening I was out again to an entertainment at the residence of one of my hospitable friends, and arrived home after midnight. There stood the ghostly furniture, there on the bed was the form of the apparently sleeping Old Morris, and there in the corner stood the shadow, little changed from last night's appearance.

The next night would be pretty close to the date of Old Morris' death. It would be that night, or the next at latest according to Mr. Bonesteel's statement. The next day I could not avoid the sensation of something impending!

I entered my room and turned off the light a little before eleven, seated myself, and waited.

The furniture tonight was, to my vision, absolutely indistinguishable from reality. This statement may sound somewhat strange, for it will be remembered that I was sitting in the dark. Approximating terms again, I may say, however, that the furniture was visible in a light of its own, a kind of "phosphorescence," which apparently emanated from it. Certainly there was no natural source of light. Perhaps I may express the matter thus: that light and darkness were reversed in the case of this ghostly bed, bureau, wardrobe, and chairs. When actual light was turned on, they disappeared. In darkness, which, of course, is the absence of physical light, they emerged. That is the nearest I can get to it. At any rate, tonight the furniture was entirely, perfectly, visible to me.

Old Morris came in at the usual time. I could see him with a clarity exactly comparable to what I have said about the furniture. He made his slight pause, his arrested motion of the right hand, and then, as usual, cast from him, according to his expression, the desire for that protective gesture, and reached a hard-looking, gnarled fist out to take hold of the mosquito-netting.

As he did so, a fearful thing leaped upon him, a thing out of the corner by the high doorway— the dreadful, purplish shadow-thing. I had not been looking in that direction, and while I had not forgotten this newest of the strange items in this fantasmagoria which had been repeating itself before my eyes for many nights, I was wholly unprepared for its sudden appearance and malignant activity.

I have said the shadow was purplish against black. Now that it had taken form, as the furniture and Old Morris himself had taken form, I observed that this purplish coloration was actual. It was a glistening, humanlike, almost metallic-appearing thing, certainly ten feet high, completely covered with great, iridescent fish-scales, each perhaps four square inches in area, which shimmered as it leaped across the room. I saw it for only a matter of a second or two. I saw It clutch surely and with a deadly malignity, the hunched body of Old Morris, from behind, just, you will remember, as the old man was about to climb into his bed. The dreadful thing turned him about as a wasp turns a fly, in great, flail-like, glistening arms, and never, to the day of my death, do I ever expect to be free of the look on Old Morris' face— a look of a lost soul who knows that there is no hope for him in this world or the next— as the great, squat, rounded head, a head precisely like that of Mrs. Heidenklang's little fish-jumbee, descended, revealing to my horrified sight one glimpse of a huge, scythe like parrot-beak which it used, with a nodding motion of the ugly head, to plunge into its writhing victim's breast, with a tearing motion like the barracuda when it attacks and tears.

I fainted then, for that was the last of the fearful picture which I can remember.

I AWAKENED a little after one o'clock, in a dark and empty room peopled by no ghosts, and with my own, more commonplace, mahogany furniture thinly outlined in the faint light of the new moon which was shining cleanly in a starry sky. The fresh night-wind stirred the netting of my bed. I rose, shakily, and went and leaned out of the window, and lit and puffed rapidly at a cigarette, which perhaps did something to settle my jangling nerves.

The next morning, with a feeling of loathing which has gradually worn itself out in the course of the months which have now elapsed since my dreadful experience, I took my drawing again, and added as well as I could the fearful scene I had witnessed. The completed picture was a horror, crude as is my work in this direction. I wanted to destroy it, but I did not, and I laid it away under some unused clothing in one of the large drawers of my bedroom wardrobe.

Three days later, just after Christmas, I observed Despard's car driving through the streets, the driver being alone. I stopped the boy and asked him where Mr. Despard was at the moment. The driver told me Mr. Despard was having breakfast— the West Indian midday meal— with Mr. Bonesteel at that gentleman's house on the Prince's Cross Street. I thanked him and went home. I took out the drawing, folded it, and placed it in the inside breast pocket of my coat, and started for Bonesteel's house.

I arrived fifteen minutes or so before the breakfast hour, and was pleasantly received by my old friend and his guest. Mr. Bonesteel pressed me to join them at breakfast, but I declined.

Mr. Bonesteel brought in a swizzel, compounded of his very old rum, and after partaking of this in ceremonious fashion, I engaged the attention of both gentlemen.

"Gentlemen," said I, "I trust that you will not regard me as too much of a bore, but I have, I believe, a legitimate reason for asking you if you will tell me the manner in which the gentleman known as Old Morris, who once occupied my house, met his death."

I stopped there, and immediately discovered that I had thrown my kind old host into a state of embarrassed confusion. Glancing at Mr. Despard, I saw at once that if I had not actually offended him, I had, by my question, at least put him "on his dignity." He was looking at me severely, rather, and I confess that for a moment I felt a bit like a schoolboy. Mr. Bonesteel caught something of this atmosphere, and looked helplessly at Despard. Both men shifted uneasily in their chairs; each waited for the other to speak. Despard, at last, cleared his throat.

"You will excuse me, Mr. Stewart," said he, slowly, "but you have asked a question which for certain reasons, no one, aware of the circumstances, would desire to answer. The reasons are, briefly, that Mr. Morris, in certain respects, was— what shall I say, not to do the matter an injustice?— well, perhaps I might say he was abnormal. I do not mean that he was crazy. He was, though, eccentric. His end was such that stating it would open up a considerable argument, one which agitated this island for a long time after he was found dead. By a kind of general consent, that matter is taboo on the island. That will explain to you why no one wishes to answer your question. I am free to say that Mr. Bonesteel here, in considerable distress, told me that you had asked it of him. You also asked me about it not long ago. I can add only that the manner of Mr. Morris' end was such that—" Mr. Despard hesitated, and looked down, a frown on his brow, at his shoe, which he tapped nervously on the tiled floor of the gallery where we were seated.

"Old Morris, Mr. Stewart," he resumed, after a moment's reflection, in which, I imagined, he was carefully choosing his words, "was, to put it plainly, murdered! There was much discussion over the identity of the murderer, but the most of it, the unpleasant part of the discussion, was rather whether he was killed by human agency or not! Perhaps you will see now, sir, the difficulty of the matter. To say that he was murdered by an ordinary murderer is, to my mind, an impossibility. To assert that some other agency, something abhuman, killed him, opens up the question of one's belief, one's credulity. 'Magic' and occult agencies are, as you are aware, strongly intrenched in the minds of the ignorant

people of these islands. None of us cares to admit a similar belief. Does that satisfy you, Mr. Stewart, and will you let the matter rest there, sir?"

I drew out the picture, and, without unfolding it, laid it across my knees. I nodded to Mr. Despard, and, to our host, asked:

"As a child, Mr. Bonesteel, were you familiar with the arrangement of Mr Morris' bedroom?"

"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Bonesteel, and added: "Ewrybody was! Persons who had never been in the old man's house, crowded in when—" I intercepted a kind of warning look passing from Despard to the speaker. Mr. Bonesteel, looking much embarrassed, looked at me in that helpless fashion I have already mentioned, and remarked that it was hot weather these days!

"Then," said I, "perhaps you will recognize its arrangement and even some of the details of its furnishing," and I unfolded the picture and handed it to Mr. Bonesteel.

If I had anticipated its effect upon the old man, I would have been more discreet, but I confess I was nettled by their attitude. By handing it to Mr. Bonesteel (I could not give it to both of them at once) I did the natural thing, for he was our host. The old man looked at what I had handed him, and (this is the only way I can describe what happened) became, suddenly, as though petrified. His eyes bulged out of his head, his lower jaw dropped and hung open. The paper slipped from his nerveless grasp and fluttered and zigzagged to the floor, landing at Despard's feet. Despard stooped and picked it up, ostensibly to restore it to me, but in doing so, he glanced at it, and had his reaction. He leaped frantically to his feet, and positively goggled at the picture, then at me. Oh, I was having my little revenge for their reticence, right enough!

"My God!" shouted Despard. "My God, Mr. Stewart, where did you get such a thing?"

Mr. Bonesteel drew in a deep breath, the first, it seemed, for sixty seconds, and added his word.

"Oh my God!" muttered the old man, shakily. "Mr. Stewart, Mr. Stewart! what is it, what is it? where—"

"It is a Martinique fish-zombi, what is known to professional occult investigators like Elliott O'Donnell and William Hope Hodgson as an 'elemental'," I explained, calmly. "It is a representation of how poor Mr. Morris actually met his death; until now, as I understand it, a purely conjectural matter. Christiansted is built on the ruins of French Bassin, you will remember," I added. "It is a very likely spot for an 'elemental'!"

"But, but," almost shouted Mr. Despard, "Mr. Stewart, where did you get this, it's—"

"I made it," said I, quietly, folding up the picture and placing it back in my inside pocket.

"But how—?" this from both Despard and Bonesteel, speaking in unison.

"I saw it happen, you see," I replied, taking my hat, bowing formally to both gentlemen, and murmuring my regret at not being able to remain for breakfast, I departed.

And as I reached the bottom of Mr. Bonesteel's gallery steps and turned along the street in the direction Of Old Morris' house, where I live, I could hear their voices speaking together:

"But how, how—?" This was Bonesteel.

"Why, why—?" And that was Despard.

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9: The Place With The Baboons

Bertram Atkey

1880-1952

The Grand Magazine July 1910

Collected in *The Amazing Mr Bunn*, 1911

A Smiler Bunn caper

ONE DAY in late autumn Mr. Smiler Bunn paid a visit to the Zoo. He arrived there at about half an hour before closing time, and proceeded without delay to a lonely nook at the back of the eagles' aviaries, where, unobserved by a living creature, except an elderly, bald-headed vulture of intoxicated appearance, he took from a handbag a bowler hat and a false moustache, both of which he rapidly donned. He thrust the bag under some shrubs and went back to the entrance lodge. There were many people going out of the Zoo and none coming in. He knocked peremptorily at the door of the lodge and scowled at the mild-looking individual who opened it.

"Mr. Heber Ich?" he asked sharply.

"Yes," said the mild-looking man. Smiler handed him a card.

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR SAVIDGE,
Scotland Yard.

"This is a very unpleasant thing for you, Ilch, my man," he said.

The unfortunate Ilch staggered.

"Wha— what do you mean?"

"This shortage in the gate receipts. Don't speak— don't incriminate yourself anything you say may be used in evidence against you, and don't you forget it— see? Nobody accuses you yet. You're to go to the superintendent at once to attend the inquiry. All the other gate-keepers are there already. It'll look bad, your being late." He scowled more than ever. "If you're innocent you're safe— if you're guilty, Lord 'elp you. You'd better be careful. And now slip across to the super's house. You'll probably lose your job, anyway. And don't try to bolt — you're watched! There's half a dozen detectives within reach. Here, lock your door and hook it."

Mr. Ilch put his hands to his head like a stunned person. It was not surprising that he should feel stunned, for there never was and never will be a more honest man in London than Mr. Ilch— now deceased. His accounts were perfectly in order— and he was in a hurry to prove it. Locking the door of his lodge, he galloped hastily off in the direction of the superintendent's house. Mr. Bunn watched him till he turned a corner, then taking a key from his pocket, he

opened the door, calmly stepped into the lodge, cleared all the gold and silver out of the till in two swift grabs, stepped out, relocked the door, passed carelessly through the exit gate, and took a taxi.

"Simple as kiss me hand," he said complacently; "I always reckoned it was. Poor blooming Ilch! I reckon his receipts 'll be a bit short to-night, anyhow. Serve him right for not having the courage of his convictions."

He leaned forward to the hole which leads to the taxi-driver's ear and commanded him to drive to the Religious and Temperance Tract Association's offices in Paternoster Row. This was to cover his tracks.

He stopped the taxi at the top of the Row, and took a four-wheeler to Liverpool Street. From Liverpool Street he took a bus to Piccadilly Circus. From the corner of Piccadilly he strolled along to a quiet restaurant in Wardour Street, where he proceeded to order so thorough a dinner that he became a prime favourite of the waiter at once. He took a small table in a remote corner with his face to the wall and his back to the world, and proceeded to count the result of his incursion into the realm of natural history, while the waiter brought him a sherry-and-bitters.

"Thirty-three pound twelve," he mused, and looked at his hands. "Thought I had bigger hands than that. It's deceiving work, grabbing money. However— it's not so dusty, Smiler, my lad. Be satisfied — don't be a hog. It's unlucky to be hoggish."

Then the waiter placed his apéritif before him and went away to command his soup. The restaurant was quite empty and quiet as Smiler leaned back in his chair thoughtfully smoking a igarette. As a he sat there musing he became vaguely aware of a low murmur of voices behind the wall facing him, and in an absent sort of way he listened to this murmur— much as a man lying half asleep on a sunny beach listens to the murmur of the water. But the voices rose a little and suddenly Smiler stiffened, sitting bolt upright. One of those voices he had heard before— and had not been anxious to hear again. Moreover, he had not expected to hear it, at any rate during his life.

It belonged— unless he was woefully mistaken— to no less a person than Kate the Gun, whom he had last seen being led away by a detective who had arrested her, and from whom he had understood that she was likely shortly to be extradited for the purpose of receiving something in the neighbourhood of a life sentence in New York.

And incidentally Smiler Bunn had been largely responsible for her arrest.

The thought of Kate the Gun being at large gave him a feeling as though his stomach had turned a handspring! And not unnaturally either, for he was well aware that Kate— if it really was she behind the wall — would stick at nothing to get even with him for his part in her arrest.

He listened again.

Yes, it was Kate the Gun behind the wall. There was no doubt about that. He did not know how she got there, nor did he care. She was there— that was enough for Mr. Bunn. He turned and beckoned to his waiter.

"Give a liquer of best brandy. I'm feelin' rather bilious," he said softly. "You can stop that dinner. I've lost me appetite. Bring me a steak and chips, and a pint of Scotch ale instead. I'll have a welsh rabbit to follow it."

"Yessare."

The waiter started away, but Smiler quietly called him back.

"Listen," he said.

The man listened.

"Where does that talking come from?" asked Smiler.

"Private room, sare. Three gentlemen and one madame. They have but now come. One minute before you arrive, yessare?"

Smiler produced a sovereign.

"See this?" he said.

"Oh, yessare!" said the waiter blandishingly.

"Well, now, listen to me. I want to hear what those people are saying without being seen— see? And it's worth one quid to me. One James o' goblin. Understand?"

"Oh, yessare! Will you come to zis table."

He conducted Smiler to a table round a corner— a table tucked away behind a pillar, and partly covered with newspapers. Obviously it was the table at which the waiter sat when he was not working.

"If you sit here, sare — "

The man placed a chair and Smiler sat down. The wall was now on his left, almost touching his elbow. Level with his ear there was a slight depression in the paper-covered wall.

"A hole in ze wall," said the waiter in a whisper. "It goes through. Nozzing but papare at zis end of ze hole, and nozzing but papare at ze ozzare end where is ze private room. You place the ear nearer to ze wall— a-ah, you hear? Merci, m'sieu, merci."

He took his sovereign and stood away. Mr. Bunn more or less fixed his.ear to the wall-papered tunnel leading through to the "private" room and listened tensely. Kate the Gun was speaking.

"And when I get that fat slouch I'll hand it to him good and hard. Bunn's his name, is it? When I've finished with him he won't be much more than a biscuit— and no champion biscuit neither. He threw me down, and if it hadn't been for you, Billy, 'd have been well on my road to jail."

Smiler nodded thoughtfully. He had an idea now, and when another voice was raised in answer to that of Kate the Gun that idea was confirmed. The voice which answered the adveituress was the voice of a man whom Smiler had only

seen and heard speak once before in his life— the man who, disguised as a German chef, but really a detective, had arrested Kate the Gun on the occasion when Smiler had saved his brother from her. Had this man done his duty Kate would have been extradited and in an American jail by now. But she was here— obviously because she had bribed the detective, who possibly had become one of her gang. The other two men were the "plug-uglies." Smiler knew that the moment they raised their melodious voices.

Then Kate the Gun said in a lower voice:

"Now, see here, this year's trip's been a freeze-out for us up to now, and we've got to make good quick. I'm no Oil Trust, and it gives me a sore head to see good golden bucks paid out day after day and nix paid in— see? Now, what about this lonely-miser at Horsham— say, it sounds like a dime novel. You got wise to him and his gold plate first, Michael. Now put us next to the facts and we'll work out the scheme." She spoke very softly, and "Michael," one of the "plug-uglies," answered in the same key.

And Mr. Bunn glued his ear to the wall and closed his eye in order to hear better.

Not till an hour later did he arise from that table, hand the waiter another five shillings, and hastily quit the restaurant. He left the meal he had ordered wholly untouched and stone cold; the waiter inherited that.

Two minutes after his departure there issued from the "private" room a party of four, made up of one nice-looking old lady with silvery hair but rather hard eyes, a quiet little man of German appearance, a tallish, well-built clergyman with a face like a prize-fighter, and a keen-eyed man who looked like a Colonial cardsharp. On the whole the gang of Kate the Gun were admirably disguised.

None of them took much notice of a four-wheeler a few yards from the door of the restaurant; the blinds of the cab were drawn down, and only the bland blue eyes of Smiler Bunn were visible as, peering round the blind, he carefully scrutinised the party as they left the café.

The four vanished up the street, and Smiler drove thoughtfully to a famous Fleet Street hostelry, where he devoured a meal which made the waiter look anxious.

Then he returned to his flat in Ridgeford Mansions, where he proposed to utilise an hour in silent thought. First of all he carefully marshalled and mentally arrayed before him the facts.

There was, it seemed, a miser who lived in a lonely old house just outside the Sussex village of Southwater, near Horsham. The place was known as the Tower House, because it possessed a tower of some kind. Jn the tower, it was said, the miser kept a chest of rare gold plate. On the tower, for some weird, miserish reason of his own, the owner of the gold plate kept a searchlight. The

name of the miser was Amberfold— Colonel Amberfold. And the gang of Kate the Gun proposed to "pinch" the plate of Colonel Amberfold in four days' time precisely.

That was all the information Smiler Bunn had gained from this hour at the tunnelled wall of the "private" room— that and a slightly sprained ear. They were a clever gang, and had gradually lowered their voices to little more than whispers.

Nevertheless, it was enough to furnish food for thought. Smiler rose, switched off the electric light save only for one shaded lamp on a writing-table, and, taking a large apple in his hand, reseated himself to plan things out. He had quite decided to enter into competition with Kate the Gun's gang. It was nervous work certainly, for they were a tough "bunch," but it looked like being well-paid.

The thing that puzzled Smiler most was the searchlight which Michael, the "plug-ugly," had mentioned. He couldn't see why the miserly Colonel had gone to the expense in installing it. Vainly he racked his brains, vainly he ate apple after apple, groping for a reason. And so at ten o'clock he grumpily ate what he termed a "lay-out" of eggs and bacon and went to bed.

On the following day a long, grey, speedy-looking motor-car slid to a standstill outside the Black Lion Hotel, Horsham, and its solitary occupant— a heavy-looking man with a reddish beard and moustache— having turned the car over to an individual who looked as though he usually washed in lubricating oil, and who claimed to be in charge of the garage, entered the hotel and reserved himself an apartment for three days. Then he passed on into the dining-room. The name that he wrote in the register was Huish— Coomber Huish. But the voice with which, immediately after he had registered, he proceeded to galvanize the waiter into activity was the voice of Smiler Bunn. After the meal he gave the waiter half a sovereign.

"That was a steak worth eating, my lad. And the tomatoes was hot stuff. You look after me and I'll look after you— see? Here's half a bar for you."

WHEN the waiter recovered his breath he learned that Mr. Coomber Huish was an author and was engaged in writing a book as astronomy. He had come to Horsham, it seemed, because only from a spot midway between Southwater and Horsham in all England was a certain comet to be seen during the next three days.

"I shall probably be out half the night— p'r'aps all night— while I'm here, surveying the stars and this comet, and if you want to do yourself a bit of good you'd better arrange with somebody to sit up at night to let me in," said Mr. Huish. "Side or back door'll do. I don't want to disturb the whole hotel every night. It'll be worth half a quid a night to anybody who obliges me."

The waiter implored Mr. Huish to leave it all to him, and Mr. Huish was graciously pleased to do so.

He took a little run in his car on the Southwater road during the afternoon.

It may be explained here that the first thing Smiler Bunn had done on his return to town after the episode of the Duchess of Cornchester's diamonds in the New Forest was to take a thorough course of lessons in the art of motor-driving and managing.

During his spin he had found occasion to pull up and refresh himself at the Vine Inn, Southwater, and, thanks to a few innocent questions, a certain freedom in the standing of drinks, and the natural garrulousness of the landlord, he had learned quite a number of interesting facts concerning Colonel Amberfold of the Tower House.

They were neither pleasant nor encouraging. Smiler, lying on a lounge in the smoking-room after a heavy meat tea, reviewing the information he had gathered, came to the conclusion that Colonel Amberfold was a person to whom he had taken a pronounced dislike. Like most misers, the Colonel lived quite alone in the house, but he had taken precautions. The fighting baboons, for instance; Michael had not mentioned them.

Yet the Colonel kept a brace of them— surly, dangerous, dog-toothed, hairy demons that feared nothing in the world when their anger was aroused. "Better than house-dogs," the landlord of the "Vine" had said, and after he had listened to a description of how they had dealt with a poacher's lurcher, fatally, which had come within their reach some time before, Smiler had been inclined to agree with him.

"And every night one of em chained on a forty-foot chain to the front door, and the other on a forty-foot chain to the back door," mused Smiler. "Well, it looks like a window entrance for me. Fighting baboons— ugh! Give me 'plug-uglies' for choice. Seems to me I'll have to break my usual rule here. 'No violence' is very good as a rule, but I don't see much sense in gettin' scragged by a blinking baboon. Fair's fair, anyhow, and from what I can hear these apes are as strong as lions and as cunning as tigers. No scraggin' for Smiler, I don't think!"

He thought again of the wanton savagery with which— according to the landlord of the "Vine," at any rate— the baboons had killed the wretched lurcher, and, quite suddenly, and to his extreme surprise, he felt a surge of blood to his heat, hot and furious. He was angry.

"Why, what's this?" he muttered, got off the sofa, and looked at himself in a mirror over the fireplace. "Lost your wool, have you, Mr. 'Uish? Well, and quite right too, my lad. Dogs are fair play— dogs are gentlemen. But baboons is beastly. Tear you to pieces, do they? Ah—well, we'll see."

He left the smoking-room and the hotel still a little flushed.

When he came back half an hour later he had in each of the side-pockets of his jacket a Browning automatic pistol and cartridges to match.

He laid them on his dressing-table and smiled upon them.

"Lucky to get you two gents in a one-eyed town like this," he said affably. "Just the lads to teach etiquette to baboons, ain't you?"

He slipped them into a drawer and locked it. Then he went down to get what he termed a "mouthful of dinner."

THE RESIDENCE of Colonel Amberford lay rather far back from the main road, and was approached by a narrow lane some hundred yards long. A field stretched between the main road and the dense shrubberies which surrounded the house, and the lane ran down one side of this field. At the road-end of the lane was an ordinary five-barred gate giving entry to the field.

It was at this spot that between twelve and one in the night following the arrival of Smiler Bunn at Horsham a curious happening might have been witnessed by anyone with a habit of nocturnal prowling and ability to see in the dark.

It was a black moonless night; the darkness was so profound as to render it almost impossible to see even the white road. But at twelve o'clock there appeared floating silently through the darkness a small dim light coming along the road from the direction of Horsham. It grew gradually larger and brighter, and brought with it a whirr of a powerfully-engined and carefully-driven motor-car. The car slid level with the lane and slowed to a crawl. Quietly the driver turned the car so that it faced towards Horsham again, stopped it, and, getting down, ran quickly across to the gate in the field and opened it, fastening it back. Then, very carefully, he backed the car into the field, and left it there with its sharp semi-racer nose pointing straight across the corner of the lane to the main road. Thus the car could remain practically invisible from the road, but nevertheless could take the main road again, as it were, at a single bound, if necessary.

The driver chuckled softly, extinguished the light, and, leaving his overcoat in the car, moved quietly away down the lane towards the Tower House.

Mr. Smiler Bunn was what he termed "on the job."

Not fifteen minutes later a big, brilliantly-lighted car boomed up from the other direction— as though proceeding to Horsham — passed the lane, slowing as it passed, and some five hundred yards farther on stopped, the roar of the engine dying out gradually. It had been run close into the edge of the road. There were three people in the car— two men and a woman. The men alighted and spread out an assortment of motor tools upon the driver's seat. The woman — she was wearing a man's cap— got down and took off a fur cloak. She was dressed in man's clothes, and with a quick whisper moved silently away from

the car. Instantly one of the men stood on the seat of the tonneau and stared steadily towards the Tower House. The woman had slipped through a gap in the hedge level with which the car had pulled up and headed stealthily away towards the house. Kate the Gun and her gang seemed to have put their raid forward two days.

Hardly had the second car stopped when a third, moving silently as only a steam-car can, and absolutely unlighted, glided up, on the heels as it were of the big petrol car, and stopped soundlessly at the head of the lane. There were three men, including the driver, in this car, and had Smiler Bunn been there he would have recognized them from their voices alone— for Smiler never forgot a voice or a face. One of them was the "plug-ugly" Michael, who had told Kate the Gun of Colonel Amberfold's hoarded plate. The others were two London thieves whom Smiler had encountered more than once before. One was a skilful scoundrel, whose favourite line of business was safe-breaking, but who was willing to embark on any little enterprise that promised profit without too much risk. He was known in certain police and criminal circles as "City Joe." The third man was one "Captain" Panton, a "smasher" or counterfeiter, and a close companion of City Joe. These three whispered together for a few moments, and finally two of them went quietly down the lane.

Things seemed ominous for Colonel Amberfold's gold plate. No less than three individual expeditions were "out" after it on this very dark night. And the curious part of the whole business was that there was no coincidence about it at all. It was due to perfectly natural causes.

Smiler Bunn was trying to forestall Kate the Gun, whose attempt on the plate he thought was to take place two nights later. That accounted for Smiler.

City Joe's trio also were trying to forestall Kate the Gun, thanks to Michael, the "plug-ugly," which gentleman, dissatisfied at the share he was to receive as a member of the Kate the Gun's gang, had deserted the standard of that American adventuress and formed his own gang. That accounted for the presence of the steam-car party.

And Kate the Gun, expecting that Michael would endeavour to cut in before her, had shifted her raid two days before in order to get the plate before Michael had time to form his own little army.

SMILER BUNN lay flat on his stomach— much to the discomfort of that usually pampered organ— in the dense shrubbery which surrounded the Tower House.

Only his head protruded from the undergrowth. He was staring intently towards the house through a pair of night-glasses.

He had taken his bearings that afternoon disguised as a tramp, and he knew that only twenty yards of ill-kept lawn lay between him and the front door and

windows of the house. The sky seemed to have lightened a shade during the past twenty minutes, and he could just make out the black bulk of the building.

He had lain there some minutes listening and sharing— a Browning pistol resting in the crook of his left arm— and during those minutes he had heard and seen absolutely nothing. But he was uneasy— with an uncanny, creeping uneasiness that he had never before experienced. The place was utterly soundless, but the darkness felt inhabited. It was as though out there in the darkness, perfectly still, perfectly quiet, there were things standing, waiting for him to step on the lawn.

He put down his glasses and clutched his pistol; the butt felt warm and comfortable and reassuring. A Browning automatic pistol is the last word in rapid-firing pocket-size weapons, anyway, and Smiler was feeling glad of it.

He snuggled down in the shrubbery, listening. There was no hurry after all, and he wanted his nervous fit to pass off before proceeding to locate the baboons.

Then, as he lay there, be became gradually aware that the darkness seemed to be waking up. Away across the lawn something yawned enormously; Smiler heard the long sighing inhalation and exhalation of breath, and instantly after a snap of huge teeth brought sharply together. Then something grunted and a chain rattled a little.

Half a second later came the clear, crisp crunch of a soft sole on the gravel— just one, no more. It was as though someone had inadvertently stepped off the turf bordering the coach drive on to the gravel, and then suddenly stepped back on to the turf.

"Hallo?" breathed Smiler. "Who's this?"

From the black patch against the sky right away to the right of the house, which Smiler knew was formed by a clump of half a dozen stunted fir trees, came a low squeak and a sudden soft, liquid pop. In the silence Smiler heard it distinctly. Someone under the firs had drawn a cork from a bottle.

A cold thrill fluttered along the spine of Mr. Bunn, as, following the sound of the cork, he heard several grunts from somewhere near the front door of the house. A chain rattled as though it was being drawn across a gravel path, and in a moment the rattle was joined by the swishing sound of the chain as it was dragged over the grass.

Evidently one of the baboons was suspicious. The sound of the chain ceased. The animal appeared to be staring into the shrubbery, then it grunted again; it seemed to be under the fir clump. Smiler remembered that it had a run of forty feet, and drew back into the bushes. The swish of the chain began, and, judging from the sound of it, the animal returned to its shelter by the front door. Followed a sound of eating— and thirty seconds later three hoarse barks, an almost human growl, a moan, the thud of a fall, and silence.

Smiler felt his skin creep and his hair lift. For a moment his blood seemed to freeze. He had seen nothing at all, but he knew what had happened as though the tragedy had occurred in broad daylight.

One of the baboons had been poisoned.

Out there in the mysterious dark someone, clever as himself, was working swiftly, ruthlessly, silently.

And his instinct told him it was Kate the Gun; she was out there somewhere under the fir trees. Probably she had poisoned a banana with some swift poison from the bottle she had just uncorked.

But if that was so it was not she whose single footstep he had heard on the coach drive. It was impossible for her to be in two places at once, and the fir trees were at least forty yards from the spot where the gravel had crunched.

He stiffened abruptly. Two men had suddenly run softly, on tiptoe, round the edge of the lawn. They passed no more than two feet from his face. And then his heart stood still, for there sounded from the Tower a quick hiss and cackle, and a blinding spear of white light stabbed out into the darkness, sweeping across the shrubbery like the sword of Fate.

The searchlight. Its great clear-cut javelin, passed swiftly over Smiler's head, hung steady for a moment— that was when it picked out Smiler's car— quivered and steadied again and yet again, as it disclosed both the other cars. Then it lifted and swung away to the left. The cold clear beam settled upon a cottage in the village and suddenly began to flicker as a cinematograph projection flickers. The centre of its circle was a window— or what was evidently intended for a window. It looked now like a black shutter. The cottage was really the police-station— a miniature affair that sheltered one constable only. The district sergeant lived in the next village.

And Colonel Amberfold was signalling desperately to the constable. That was why he had installed the searchlight; the fierce, white glare flickering on and off into his bedroom would almost wake a dead policeman, to say nothing of even a village constable.

Suddenly there was a muffled cry from under the firs. The searchlight wheeled and swooped down. Smiler Bunn, lying flat to the earth, a "gun" gripped in each hand, saw in the cold light one with a face that was unmistakably the face of Kate the Gun twist furiously away

from the grip of two men. She was dressed in man's clothes, but a lock of black hair falling down her cheek betrayed her.

In her right hand was a revolver, and she jammed in in the faces of the two men with a look and gesture of such ferocity that they quailed back from her.

Not five yards from the group a monstrous black misshapen thing, grotesquely human, jumped about straining at a glittering chain, and uttering queer grunting barks.

Even as Smiler recognized the two men a thin sharp voice quavered down from the top of the Tower:

"Clear out or I'll shoot! I've a shot-gun here!"

Three white faces turned unpwards and dropped instantly as the glare of the searchlight hit the pupils of their eyes. Then the chain of the baboon snapped suddenly and the brute flung forward with a howl. It looked like some kind of devil. One of the men swung a weapon blindly at the ape; it appeared to be a bar of black steel; but really it was a sandbag, and it took the baboon on the side of the head.

There was no sound, but the baboon dropped like a dead thing. Michael, the "plug-ugly," was one of the most expert sandbaggers in the world.

Kate the Gun flung her revolver viciously at the head of the other man (Smiler recognized him as City Joe) and ran forward out of the beam of light. Smiler heard her panting as she passed him, running to the coach road.

There was a savage snarling oath from Michael, the American ruffian, and he pitched his sandbag into the darkness after her.

"Come away, you fool!" cried City Joe, gripping the "plug-ugly's" arm. "There's nothing doing to-night."

"Aw, ina minute," said Michael, and shook the other off.

He raised a fist clenched round a revolver, and staring straight into the eye of the searchlight pulled the trigger once— twice.

With the second report the dazzling ray vanished— precisely as though it had been blown out.

Out of the profound and pitchy blackness that followed Smiler heard a low groan from the Tower. More footsteps pattered across the lawn before him, and suddenly all was silent. The whole affair had not lasted five minutes.

A faint acrid fume of burnt powder found its way into his nostrils and he shivered slightly.

He lay there listening; almost immediately he heard from somewhere near the head of the lane the rush of a suddenly started engine, followed by the diminishing note of a receding motor. Evidently one of the parties had gone.

He rapidly thought the thing over. Now was his time if he meant doing anything. The others had cleared the way to the gold plate for him if he cared to risk waiting there. But with a dead man on the Tower it was a dangerous risk— if the man at the searchlight was dead. If the shots had alarmed the village, the sooner he was out of it the better. He felt fairly certain that the searchlight had alarmed nobody— least of all the policeman. For not half an hour before he had "shuttered" that policeman's bedroom window himself with a specially-made black-painted wooden shutter muffled in sacking and attached to two long bamboo poles. And even a searchlight cannot shine through half an inch of deal.

He listened for a few seconds longer; they seemed like weeks. There was no sound from any quarter. He remembered that two shots in quick succession are heard not infrequently at night in a district where game is reared and poachers are plentiful.

"When thieves fall out," he muttered, "honest men get a bit of their own back, and I'll chance it."

He crawled out from his shrubbery and stole across to the house, pulling out his electric flash-lamp. In the afternoon he had marked a certain french window. This he found, and two minutes later he was inside the house.

First he went up into the Tower.

At the top he found the Colonel— a lean, mean-looking little man— lying in a heap under the broken searchlight. He turned him over and hastily examined him. He was unhurt save for a nasty graze along the side of the head just above the ear. The "plug-ugly's" bullet had cut a long furrow through the hair, but a touch told Smiler that it was no more than skin deep. He lifted the man carefully, and carried him downstairs to a sort of bed-sitting-room immediately below, and laid him on the bed.

Then he turned briskly to a big safe in the corner. If there was anything worth stealing in the house, he fancied some of it, at any rate, would be here— the garrulous landlord had told him that only about two rooms in the place were furnished, and a glance or two as he entered had confirmed this.

The safe was locked, but with unerring instinct he turned back to the man on the bed. The keys were in the pockets of the shabby dressing-gown.

Ten seconds later half of Smiler Bunn was in the safe and half out— and his hands were busy.

Presently he paused and turned to the figure on the bed.

"You're a miser all right, mate," he said humorously. "But you're a dashed good miser. I will say that for you. I've never heard of a miser before who mised precious stones instead of precious money, but I'm glad to find that there's one any'ow, and I'm pleased to meet you, miser."

He rose from his knees and held a handful of loose-cut jewels under his flashlight. There were all kinds there— diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and lesser stones— none astonishingly big, but all valuable.

Smiler slipped them into his pocket and addressed the figure on the bed:

"Of course, I know as well as if you'd told me that this little lot ain't the pick of the bunch," he said in a friendly voice; "the big 'uns are hid all over the house, here and there. But I ain't no hog; Colonel, and I ain't got time to look for em any'ow. So you can have them. So long! You'll be all right— bar a bit of an 'eadache."

He put a water-bottle within reach of the Colonel, and quietly cleared out.

His car was waiting exactly as he left it, and he lighted the lamps and climbed in.

"London, first stop. Change here for Horsham!" he said playfully in the manner of a railway porter, and ran her out on to the main road.

"Ah, well," he chuckled, "when thieves fall out—"

But the remainder of the proverb was drowned by the rising note of the engine.

10: Leatherbee's Luck

George Allan England

1877-1936

Blue Book, April 1922

"IT'S no use, Talby," Geneva Carbury insisted. "I admit I like you awfully I well, but I can't marry you, and you know why."

"On account of your business, same as usual?" demanded Talbot Sears as they hiked along the serpentine path round the Reservoir.

"Yes, I'm attached to it, and—"

"So's a convict attached to his business, when he's in the chain-gang with an iron ball riveted to his leg. That's no way to live! You can't go on this way, Geneva. What's a can-opener-manufacturing concern, compared to love?"

"Lots!" Her dark-brown eyes, which sometimes danced with laughter, now looked quite tragic and determined. "I've got to make a success of my business before I can think of trying to make a success of love. If I let Carbury Can-cutters, Incorporated, die, how could I ever be a successful wife to you? I just couldn't!"

"Nonsense!" He slashed at the autumn leaves along the path with the stick in his gloved hand. She tilted up her chin, rather adorably.

"Thank you!" she answered.

"Oh, I— I don't really mean that, you know," he hedged. "I didn't mean to be rude, and all that, but—"

"It's all right, Talby; but I've got to make good, first."

"Yes, and if you don't? Hang it all, Geneva, isn't my profession grinding out enough for two?"

"Oh, yes. But I didn't take that commercial-efficiency course just to let my father's business die in less than two years after he died himself. That business is all the memorial he ever wanted. He built it up for me, willed it to me and told me to carry on. And now you want me to drop it?"

"And marry me. Sure thing! And be my partner. Why not?"

She shot at him one of those swift woman-glances that flash into a man's soul while the man himself is asking himself the color of a woman's eyes.

"No," she decided. "You're making a success of *your* game. I've got to, of mine. I will, too— when I get that improved machinery and put through those patents. After Carbury Can-Cutters, Incorporated, is on a paying basis and I ve got an independent income of my own, well,"— and she laughed shortly,— "maybe I'll offer you a partnership. Not till then. Now, let's talk about the weather."

"THE whole situation is manifestly absurd," Talbot complained to Robert Boardman, second, that night at the Circulatory Club. "Geneva's absurd too."

"Any man thinks any woman's absurd when she wont have him," Boardman affirmed. He slumped down angularly in the deep leather chair by the fireplace. "That's part of man's natural egotism. I never knew a fellow yet who ever heard about a man-hater without thinking that if she knew him —"

"None o' your cynicism! Geneva's not a man-hater, at all. It's only that her perverse can-opening bug—"

"Loyalty to one's father isn't a bug."

"Well— if she wasn't so infernally obstinate!"

"You're a fool to argue with a woman. Kiss her."

"Can't be did."

"So?" Boardman fitted another cigarette to his amber, holder, and lighted up. "Interesting!"

"Oh, you can afford to be patronizing, all right. But if your girl—"

"Ah, but I married my girl two years ago. I got her by working a little judicious jealousy into her cosmos. That's good dope, Talby. Stay away from Geneva awhile. Let her miss you."

"It won't work with her. She's up to her pretty ears in can-openers, and till she makes 'em succeed— which they never will in a thousand years—"

"By the end of which time neither of you will be much. Make it sooner, old man. Help her succeed, pronto. After that, she's yours. Simple, eh?" Boardman smiled dryly and blew smoke. "Boost her confounded can-openers. Then annex her. Slip me a few thousand, Talby, and I'll resuscitate the dry bones of her company's securities. I'll make live stock of 'em. Make her company a blooming success. Then you nab her— and there you are!"

Talbot shook a mournful head.

"Your advice is no good, Bob. I don't want a business woman for my wife, at all."

"Well, then," judged Boardman, "knife her company. That's the only thing left to do. She'll have to admit defeat, and then she'll be yours. In a year she'll have forgotten there was ever such a thing in the world as a can-opener. She wont even have one in your happy kitchenette. Nothing but canned-goods with keys to 'em. Can Carbury Can-cutters, Incorporated. That's the key to all your heartaches. Put the outfit on the blink."

"There isn't much of an outfit to put," said Talbot, his eyes approving. "Only Geneva and old Ezra Litchfield, her inherited factotum."

"Cinch. Smear 'em!"

"Is it etiquette to smear the lady you're in love with?"

"Sure!" asserted Boardman. "It's done in the best circles. All's fair in love and war on can-openers."

"It seems kind of a rotten thing to do," hesitated Talbot, "but the ends justify being mean, and—"

"Being a broker, I'm a practical man. It's your only chance."

"How can you work it? Got any idea?"

"I've got millions of ideas, Talby. Billions! That's what I live and move and have my beans on, is ideas. Now, in this particular case, I've got one of most particular brilliancy. Well?"

"Spill it!" commanded Talbot.

DOARDMAN smoked contemplatively.

"Did you ever hear of such a thing as a natural, born, invincible hoodoo?"

"No—not seriously, that is. Of course, there's a lot of jokes about hoodoos, but—"

"I don't mean any joke-stuff at all. I mean the real, simon-impure article. I mean a hoodoo that crabs everything from cradle to grave. A hoodoo marked with the Black Spot of the Cosmic Swat. Ever know a man like that?"

"No," replied Talbot. "It's all foolishness."

"Not at all. Luck's a solid fact. Some people turn everything they touch into

cash. Others would queer the City of Gold if they owned a single lot in Angel Avenue. Every broker knows it. They're marked men. Nobody will have 'em in their business. Most brokers wont even trade with 'em. It means ruin. Fact, old man!"

"By ginger, that's odd. But admitting it's a fact, what about it?—"

"Lots. I know a hoodoo."

"Well?"

"His name's Leatherbee— Jonah K. Leatherbee. He's done more failing and messed up more businesses than any living man. As a false alarm, he's sublime."

"How does this apply to Geneva and me?"

"I'll make it apply," promised Boardman. "Thing is, do you give me the go-ahead signal?"

"Rather— just so I get the girl."

"You're on," smiled the broker. "Carbury Can-cutters, Incorporated, is as good as dead already. I'll interview Leatherbee tomorrow."

"And what have I got to do?"

"Nothing— but order your wedding raiment. Get busy!"..

BOARDMAN interviewed Jonah K. Leatherbee next afternoon. He found him in a shabbily furnished room on Parkland Street, third floor, back.

"Hello, Leatherbee," said he. "How's tricks?"

"Hopeful, as usual," Leatherbee replied. Leatherbee was a tall, asparagus-stalk-built man of forty-five, with mild blue eyes, stooped shoulders and an eyeshade. "I have several hens on. Even one hatching will fix me."

"That's good," smiled the wily broker, sitting down. "I've got a fine tip for you. It'll change your luck."

"Glad o' that!" smiled Leatherbee. "It could stand a lot of changing— like a thousand-dollar bill."

"I know. You never have connected right, have you?"

"Not perceptibly." Leatherbee folded himself in sections into a chair. "I know I'm a jinx, all right, but I'm long on hope."

"Is it true," Boardman asked, "that you've put your whole family on the blink?"

"Looks like it," admitted Leatherbee, who appeared human and liked to talk. "When I was bom, Saturn was in conjunction with the Seven Veils of Jinx and in opposition to everything in my luck-line. My folks were comfortably well off, though not as well off as they had been. My influence went back, you see, and even hit my innocent old grandfather."

"Retroactive hoodooism, eh?"

"Something like that. Grandfather was worth a lot of money. He lost it in a big smash in the 40's and in Ohio land-speculation. His son— my father— piled up a bit of property, but missed millions when he was in Chicago right after the big fire and didn't invest there. Instead, he invested in a couple of Western boom towns. Both booms busted. I figure I'm responsible, even though I hadn't been born then."

Leatherbee nodded, and lighted his pipe. Boardman asked:

"What then? I'd like to get your complete story, before I spill the tip I've got for you. After you personally arrived in this vale of tears, what happened to Saturn and the Pleiades?"

"Lots. But more happened to me. My father gave up the struggle and died, when I was only a youngster. A few days later our last piece of family property— a big brick block— was wrecked by a tornado. Then my brother and sister had to quit school, and we all struggled through soul-destroying shabby gentility— boarders, and all that. At five, I got a severe injury that made an outsider of me. You know how boys are, with a lame duck. I went in for study, as time passed, and did well. But when I graduated from high school and took a medal, I remember my only pants were patched with black velvet."

"Well," commented Boardman, "you can't say you never had any velvet in your life."

"Never any in my pocket. The velvet I refer to wasn't there, but more to the southward. After that, I wanted to go to college, but instead I went to a factory, where I got asthma, a mashed hand and nine dollars a week. Then my sister married a highly prosperous business man. Right away his place burned, and he took to booze and went nutty. For twenty years he hasn't earned a cent, and he's kept the family in hot water all that time."

"Hot water is a luxury, these days."

"This was boiling. I broke away and into college, did all kinds of work and made the grade. Graduated with an M. A. degree, a Phi Beta Kappa key, a debt of four hundred dollars and nervous prostration from doing my own work and other fellows' too— tutoring 'em, to help pay expenses. Just about that time my uncle, the only rich one in the family, had a tannery and a big general store. He got his hand chopped off in the tannery and lost his store in a panic. Uncle went in for politics and held a meeting in the tannery. Floor fell through, lot of people got hurt and Uncle had ter pay damages. Besides that, the opposition slogan that, 'His platform has fallen through,' defeated him at the polls. Then the tannery burned, and Uncle— he was about sixty— had to hunt a job. Saturn and I finished him, all right."

"I think you're going to be just the man I'm looking for," Boardman approved. "Anything else?"

"Rather!" smiled Leatherbee, through smoke. "My brother, a highly trained man, after twenty years' hard work for a very big concern, had his salary cut a thousand a year and was buried alive in a small branch office while a relative of the president of the company got his job. Then my Aunt Elvira met an army officer who got engaged to her daughter and sold the old lady about twelve thousand dollars' worth of gilt-edged securities. The officer turned out to be a fake and the securities all forged. Exit officer and kale. After that—"

"You'll do, Leatherbee. Now listen."

"Wait! I married, and right away after that developed T. B. Had to bury myself in the woods for several years, to save my life. I went through hell with my wife's relatives, who— well, weren't the kind of people one cares to know. I wanted a son, to help pull the family together. Of course, Saturn handed me a daughter. After that—"

"I did hear something about your getting a divorce."

"Yes. Draw the veils, Infidelity, drugs and alcohol don't make a pleasant story. The divorce cost me every penny I'd scraped together. At thirty-eight I had nothing left but a daughter with extravagant tastes. I continued to hustle, though. Went into an oil-company with good leases. Couple of days before I expected to clean up forty thousand dollars, some crooks wrecked the business. I got nothing. Later, tried oil again, in Oklahoma. Dry holes, every one."

"Now, the proposition I have in mind—"

"Hold on! I want you to get me right. I scraped up a little cash, bought a place in Cuba and went in for fruit. Hadn't been a cyclone in that town for seventeen years. The year after I started, a cyclone wrecked the place— backed up a river and flooded it, too. I lost my house and all my personal effects. Saturn and I put Las Palomitas on the eternal blink."

"You were in politics for a while after that, weren't you?"

"Yes. They ran me for Governor of a certain New England State, on a third ticket. I was defeated by the largest plurality ever given in the State. Then I undertook to edit a magazine, and the magazine died. I took to writing, but the soar in paper and costs cut down the book-market. I sold four movies; and right away the censorship K. O.'d the business. Organized a movie-company of my own, It went blooey. I think if I'd gone into manufacturing coffins, Saturn would have stopped everybody dying."

"Why didn't you try that, Leatherbee, and become a great public benefactor?"

"No. Death's a sore subject with me, ever since my niece, that I was struggling to put through college, died suddenly."

"I see. Well— maybe it's been your own fault, some way. Bad habits, or—"

"I never drank or gambled, Boardman. I belong to no clubs and waste no time. I smoke nothing but this pipe. I've made as good a fight as I know how. But Saturn has always knifed me. Every winner I've ever picked has become a loser. And I've dragged down lots of other people, too— that is, Saturn and I have."

"You ought to have enlisted on the side of the Germans, in the war," smiled Boardman.

"I would have, if I could have got to Germany. I'd have done just that, as a patriotic duty. Then the Kaiser would have been licked in three weeks. I can turn my hand to about any old thing, and I can hustle; but I'm always sat on by Saturn. Every time I get to Good Luck Junction, the train's just gone. If I caught that train, it would be wrecked at the first switch. Get me right, Boardman. Before you spill your proposition, let me warn you if it's anything you're expecting to succeed, don't let me in on it."

"It isn't," said the broker. "It's something I'm expecting to fail. I want you to help me. Now, listen!"

GENEVA CARBURY, the desirable, came into the drab little office on South Exchange Street at ten minutes to nine, hung up her rain-cape and limpsy turban, and sat down at the old-fashioned black-walnut desk her father had once occupied. Old Ezra Litchfield, already puttering with file-boxes, gave her a solicitous good morning. In the gloom of that rainy, chill November day he squinted at her over his misty glasses.

"Well, what's on for today, Ezra?" the girl queried briskly.

"There's that Baxter note comin' due this noon," the old man mumbled. "An' Caldwell was in already, this mornin', to see about that bill. An' I got a phone-call, just after I swep' out, from Morrisey & Black. They say if we don't—"

"I wish you wouldn't bother me with unimportant details," interrupted Geneva severely. Old Litchfield was good as gold. Consistent goodness is, at times, extremely trying. This was one of those times. In three weeks Geneva had

had no word from Talbot Sears; and indirectly she had heard that he had twice taken Kay Montgomery out in his car.

Geneva looked up from the pile of letters on her desk— an even slimmer pile than usual, which was saying much. She regarded the faithful retainer of the besieged fortress with some irritatigp. His old-fogy ways and his solicitude were thorns in her young, fair and eminently lovely feminine flesh. Her brown eyes narrowed at Litchfield. Very much indeed she wanted to replace him with a hustler, a man of intelligence and pep. But men like that cost money. And old Litch could be —and often had been— hung up for his salary.

"And then too," thought Geneva, "it's my duty to keep him. Father always did. But, oh!"

When it came to trials, though, Litch wasn't any more a trial than the out-of-date office equipment— or than the lamentable shares in Carbury Can-cutters, Incorporated, that nobody ever wanted to buy. And beside— but when Geneva let herself think about trials, why, there never came an end of them. So she only tightened her full lips, red as cinnabar, and turned back to the morning's mail.

Just the regulation thing, as per usual:

"We are therefore returning the consignment—"

"Sorry to report that—"

"Kindly remit, or—"

"Regret that we cannot file your patent, in spite of its manifest excellence, until some further payment has been made on the bill now due—"

"Account overdrawn. Please deposit to cover, and avoid protest-fees—"

GENEVA laid down the mail, her pretty eyes dejected. A little of the November rain seemed to have got into them; but perhaps that was only an optical illusion. Something very like a sigh, however, made old Litchfield glance up from his puttering. He shook his bald head

"We can't go on much longer this way, Miss Geneva," said he. Ezra had known her since she was knee-high to a flounder, known her when she had used to come like a ray of June sunshine into that same shabby old office, and sit at the little side-table and cut out paper-lace with the office shears. So she never could be "Miss Thacher" to him. Nor could he hold back from her the griefs now corroding his withered but supremely loyal heart.

"We can't go on," he repeated. "Bank-balance at the Old Colonial is down to $47.86; rent's overdue; an' Comerford wont accept any more manufacturin'-orders till we settle that last bill o' $197.25. Not a stock-sale from McCallum & Rice in three months, an' how about that printin' bill for letterheads? I'm not sayin' a word about my pay, Miss Geneva, not one word! But this here typewriter's just got to be fixed up some way. It's all out o' kilter. Take that there letter e, for instance—"

"I know all about that letter e," she caught him up. Indeed she did know, only too painfully. She hadn't used that balky machine for months; she hadn't for weeks past doctored up that defective e with a pencil on every letter sent out, without knowing all about it. "But," she concluded, "it wont do any good to the business and the machine to hang crape all over them."

"That's so, Miss Geneva, but—"

"There's no but to it, Ezra. If we can hold on a little longer, and somehow get that patent of mine on the market, I know it'll turn the tide. Millions of people use can-openers, and with this new multum-in-parvo device applied to ours—"

"You've said that so often, Miss Geneva," answered the old henchman, with resigned incredulity. He hobbled over and stood beside her, his thin, brown-spotted hands clasped over his thin brown waistcoat. Anxiously he observed that Miss Geneva's cheek had lost a very little of its fair, fresh roundness and color. That wounded Ezra to the heart of hearts. It would have wounded Talbot too, had he been able to see, would have made his enterprise of helping to wreck Carbury Cancutters, Incorporated, all the more imperative.

Now Ezra boldly pleaded:

"Why d'you want to keep up a losin' fight? It's only discreditin' your father's memory— not helpin' it a mite; an' it's wearin' you plumb out. I aint speakin' for myself. What happens to me don't matter. I can go back to my brother's, down to Eastham on Cape Cod. I'll be all right there."

"Nonsense, Ezra!"

"But you, Miss Geneva—why, you're growin' that pickid! I'd ruther, a great sight, see you sell out for what the business an' good-will might bring— mebbe almost enough to cover liabilities— an' then marry some nice, good, hustlin' young fella—"

"That'll do, Ezra; that'll do. You've got your work. Let me do mine!"

DECISIVELY she went on opening letters. This kind of talk, in her present mood, decidedly wouldn't do. She swallowed hard, and ripped the disheartening envelopes with an energy quite disproportionate to the task.

At the third one she gasped, turned red, then pale. She sank back in the antique swivel-chair. The letter shook in her hand. A little slip of paper with a perforated end fluttered to the desk.

"Oh!" gasped Geneva.

Ezra turned.

"What now?" he anxiously queried. "Dear Miss Geneva, please listen to an old man, an'—"

Geneva's eyes closed. Ezra thought she was fainting. But all at once she sat up very straight, and in a quivering voice exclaimed:

"Just listen to this!

R. G. Thacher & Co.,
176 South Exchange St.,
City.
Gentlemen:
Inclosed find check for One Thousand Dollars ($1,000.), covering sale of 200 shares of your Preferred, to Simpson Peters Co., New York.
Very truly yours,
McCallum & Rice."

Old Litchfield stood there, trembling, staring. He advanced to her, with hands outstretched.

"Miss Geneva! What— what?"

"We've done it, Ezra! We've pulled through! We— we've—"

Ezra turned and hastened toward the faucet over the little sink in the corner.

"I'll get you a glass o' water, Miss Geneva! There, there now, don't cry— don't cry."

Between the glass of water that the old man's shaking hands slopped, and Geneva's bright brown eyes brimming from a heart too long full, they had rather a moist time of it.

But with R. G. Thacher & Co. saved, what mattered a little moisture, either inside the office or outside? In spite of it all, the sun was shining as it never had, for Miss Geneva.

ANOTHER month, rolling round as months— be they good or bad— always do, brought -Christmas very nigh. But Christmas cheer was about the last thing in this world to fill the heart of Talbot Sears. A very great, consuming bitterness had crowded it all away— that and a heavy anger against Bob Boardman, stockbroker in his business-hours, dicer with Destiny outside of them.

"Nice, healthy dopester you are, you with your infernal hoodoo!" he gibed as, late of a December afternoon, Boardman and he sat together in Talbot's bachelor diggings. "When you framed that little deal, you certainly pulled a bone. Sure-fire proposition, all right, only it shot the wrong way."

Boardman looked chopfallen, under the light of the soft-shaded table-lamp.

"Damned sorry, old man," he answered. "Of course you know I never meant to crab you. But I should have realized Shaw was right when he said it's always silly to give advice, and fatal to give good advice."

"Good advice! Yeah, great! But you're bearing up, all right. Everybody's got fortitude enough to stand the wallops their friends get. Where do I fit, now?"

"My motives were the best, Talby."

"Well, you know what speedway's paved with good intentions. Now see what you've gone and done!"

Boardman smoked in moody silence, and shook his head. At last he placated:

"I never knew anything like it, Talby. It looked to me like a positively sure shot. When I had the Simpson Peters Company take your anonymous thousand and buy those two hundred shares from McCallum & Rice, and give 'em to Leatherbee, how could *I* know his jinx had gone on strike? I never knew it was a union jinx! It had never shown any eight-hour, closed-shop principles, before. It was the most conscientious, open-shop jinx I'd ever known, and—"

"So it is, for me!" cut in Talbot angrily. "This Leatherbee hoodoo of yours has crabbed me just as he's always crabbed everybody he's ever had any dealings with, directly or indirectly. Why, you poor fish, see what's happened now! With that thousand of my money—"

"Yes, I know all about it," gloomed Boardman. "She's gone and put her patent through, and got orders enough—"

"So she'll never need me," Talbot finished. "That's a royal cinch. She's

launched a successful business career for herself with my mute, inglorious kale and a damn' can-opener. From now on her motto will be: 'Why, then, the world's mine oyster, which I with Carbury's Can-cutter, Incorporated, will open.' Now you have gone and done it— you and your pet hoodoo!"

Again Boardman shook his head.

"No," said he, "it doesn't seem credible. With two hundred shares of Carbury, preferred, in his jeans,— the way it's soaring now and bound to go,— Leatherbee'll be fixed for life. It isn't reasonable, Talby. It isn't possible! It's a slip of Saturn, a kink in the cosmos, or something. All his life, Leatherbee's ruined everything he's in any way been connected with. This Carbury Can-cutter business just simply can't succeed, with Leatherbee in on it. The thing's contrary to all the laws of nature and Einstein. There's been a slip-up in the universe, somewhere."

"The slip-up's in your fool superstition, I tell you!" Talbot retorted. "Carbury Can-cutters, Incorporated, is going, and Leatherbee's a made man, and— and Geneva's ten million miles away from me, now. If you'd only let her plug the losing game a little longer, let her lose out in the natural course of events—"

A brrrrrr of the doorbell interrupted him. He got up and slatted to the door,

in slippers. Boardman, his lean frame sunk far down in an easy-chair, looked after him with eyes of misery.

"The laws of probability were all against it," he murmured. "Combinations and permutations all indicated—"

At the door, the Jamaica negro elevator-boy grinned and announced:

"Yere's yo' paper, Mr. Sears. An' vere's a letter jus' come in, on de las' mail."

Talbot returned with letter and paper, to the living-room'. He looked a little pale.

"It's from Geneva," said he. "The final wallop! Everything's all off, now— thanks to you and your meddling with hoodoos!"

Boardman framed no answer. The logic of facts had his theorizings beaten clean through the ropes. Moodily he lighted a cigarette and studied his boot-toes.

Talbot meantime held the letter in an unsteady hand, loath to open it and read his doom.

"Tough luck!" murmured Boardman as Talbot finally ripped the envelope. Through a certain instinct of delicacy, Boardman picked up the newspaper from the table where Talbot had thrown it, and with a face of commiseration began casually looking it over.

A shout, hoarsely and profanely jubilant, made him look up just as his eyes had focused on a paragraph that graced the bottom of page two.

"What's the matter, old top?" he demanded. "Gone wrong in the bean?"

"She—hang it all, Bob—she's— accepted me!" vociferated Talbot, with extravagant caperings. "She says— business judgment vindicated— fulfilled father's wishes and carried on Carbury Can-cutters, Incorporated, to success— old family name honorably upheld— now merging with Can-opener Combine and selling patents for— independent income assured, and will retire from business— free to follow dictates of her own— and she's mine, and— oh, joy! Oh, boy!"

"By Jove!" cried Boardman, jumping up. "All she wanted was success, and then you. And this item, here, explains how she *could* succeed, with Leatherbee in on it, and—"

"Oh, shake! Slap me on the back, Bob!" exulted Talbot. "Do something say something. Tell me it's real! But how— how the devil can it be, with that hoodoo?"

"See here!" Boardman commanded thrusting the paper at his pal.

Talbot's dizzied eyes read where Boardman's finger pointed:

Jonah K. Leatherbee, age 44, of Des Moines, Iowa, was found dead in his room, 198 Parkland St., at to 130 this morning.

He died while reading a morning paper, which he still held in his hand when discovered. He had marked with a pencil a financial item stating that Carbury Can-cutters, Incorporated, had just kited to 169¾.

Medical Examiner Pencoyd reports that death was due to heart-failure.

11: The Gambler Hated Rats

J. Jefferson Farjeon

1883-1955

The Evening Standard, 25 April 1955

IT DID NOT happen to me— I am not sorry to say—and it was by the merest chance that I heard of it at all. It was told to me very early on the morn ing after the event, in the waiting-room of a small Devonshire station.

I had arrived at the station with some twenty minutes to spare, and I had imagined that the twenty minutes were going to be pretty dull. The trains that stopped here were few and far between, while the little platform was one of those featureless, dead platforms that offer no form of entertainment to anybody.

At first I thought it was empty. The assumption was natural, for two people in this isolated spot savoured of a crowd, and the other occupant I joined made no movement as I went in, or sign that he had noticed me. Even when I noticed him— he was seated in the one shadowed corner— he paid me no attention for several seconds, but continued to stare, motionless, at a half-sheet of paper in his hand. Beside him, on the hard bench, was an opened envelope from which apparently the paper had been extracted.

Something tightened in me as I noted the man's expression. It came clearly to me, even through the shadows; it was the expression of one who had just received a pretty big shock. Well, in that ease, perhaps the kindest thing to do would be to make some commonplace remark and then leave him to it. But before I could act on this thought he suddenly looked up and saw me, and as though divining my intention, exclaimed quickly,

"Don't go!"

I took the bull by the horns by asking,

"Sure?"

"Quite sure," he answered. "I want someone to talk to— and-you look the kind I want."

"I'll try not to disappoint you," I said.

He took up the envelope, slipped the half-sheet he had been reading into it, pocketed it, and motioned me to the now free place beside him.

As I sat down, ne inquired, "How long have we got?"

"I've got about eighteen minutes," I replied. "I don't know about you."

He nodded. "That'll do. What I want to tell you is about the night I've just spent. I don't think it'll bore you."

I made no comment, but felt quite sure it wouldn't.

"Yesterday evening— late— I got lost," he went on. "I'd been delayed leaving the place I was staying at, and I was actually making for this station, meaning to catch the last train.

"In my anxiety I made the fatal mistake of trying a short cut across the moors. I walked into a mist and that finished my chance. I ended up in a barn in the middle of God knows where!"

He paused, and to fill the gap I said, "Yes, I know what it's like. I've got lost myself. And what did you find in the barn? A dead body?"

My suggestion startled him, but he smiled a moment later.

"Oh, nothing like that!" he answered "I found a live one. And I'll never forget that queer first sight of him! He was sitting on an upturned tub. Before him were two upturned barrels. There was a candle on one of the barrels, and playing-cards on the other.

"He turned as I came in, and the candlelight flickered not only on his unshaven face but on the card he was holding up in his hand, as though just about to place it. It was the nine of clubs. That isn't important, but I just mention it to build the picture. Him sitting there, and the candle, and the nine of clubs."

I got the picture. It added to my picture of the narrator himself, as he had looked in this waiting-room when I had entered it, staring motionless at the half-sheet now back in his pocket. But the narrator was no longer in the waitingroom. He was back in the barn. And I was very nearly there with him.

"It may sound comic," came his voice again. "But it wasn't, and you'll understand the feeling I got about that when I've finished. He was the first to speak.

" 'Oh, it's you, this time, is it?' he said.

" 'Who was it last time?'

" 'A rat,' he said. 'If there's one thing I bar, it's rats!'

" 'Then I suppose the only reason you've chosen a barn for the night,' I said, 'is because you've got lost, like me?'

" 'You've said it, chum,' he answered. 'You've said it! But now it'll be two to one, next time the bloody thing pokes its nose out!'

"Odd, but the next moment, it did! It's queer—do you ever get the feelinge—how sometimes you feel that everything is being stage-managed, and that you have nothing to do with it excepting to go through your part? I got that feeling then—and kept it throughout the night.

"That rat didn't stay. My barn companion leapt to his feet, upsetting his tube, and hurled an empty bottle at it. I noticed he had a good supply of ammunition. It was a good shot, and the rat vanished back to wherever it had come from.

"He grinned at me apologetically. 'Don't mind if I'm a bit nervy,' he said, 'but even at my best rats finish me! I reckon one must have walked over my pram when I was a baby. I can face the other chap in the ring without turning a hair.'

" 'In the war I served under an officer who was scared stiff of large spiders,' I told him— it was a fact, so you needn't worry. He won the VC.'

"He swept the cards into a heap, and began shuffling.

"What would you have done? I was tired, but there was something pathetic about the fellow, and so I fell in with his mood. We didn't playfor real money— he said he hadn't any— but we used nails for counters, there were tons about, and we must have played for three hours. Every now and again the rat reappeared, and when the bottles gave out he showered it with nails.

"It was grotesque, and I don't know how I kept awake so long. He never showed any sign of sleepiness, but my own sleepiness increased steadily, till at last it beat me and I dozed off.

"The last thing I remembered was hearing him tell me, after a count of his nails, that I owed him seven hundred pounds."

Here my companion paused, as though expecting a question. I asked it.

"Wasn't it a bit unwise to go to sleep— with a chap like that watching you?"

"It would have been damned unwise, if I could have helped it', my companion replied. "Obviously! But I couldn't help it. And when I eventually woke up— how long ago?— an hour?— I woke in a panic. As perhaps you can imagine."

"I can, very easily," I agreed. "Well? Go on?"

He took a deep breath, and rubbed his forehead.

"The barn looked completely different," he said. "Daylight instead of candlelight. The cards were gone. And so was the man, for a moment I thought I had dreamt him. But then I saw something on the tub where the cards had been. An envelope. And on it was written, in pencil, "Don't open this till you get to the station.' "

"I know you didn't," I answered, as he paused again. "But why didn't you?"

"I'm not quite sure," he responded, as though he were wondering the same thing. "Sporting instinct? Or that feeling that the whole thing was being stage managed, and that I'd be acting before my cue? I don't know, I say. But I did wait till I got here—and you came in just after rd opened the envelope and read what was inside."

"And what was inside?"

He felt in his pocket, and produced the envelope, and handed it to me. I took the half-sheet out, and this is what I found scrawled upon it:

"Thank you, chum. I enjoyed our little game, and I needed it. But what a mug to go to sleep with 40 quid in your letter-case! Only of course you didn't know that I was wanted for murder."

I swallowed, and handed the half-sheet back.

"And now, I suppose, he's wanted for your 40 quid as well?"

"Oh, no," answered my companion, ina rather choked voice, and opened the lettercase for me to see. The 40 pound notes were still there intact. All the man had taken were the half-sheet and the envelope.

"So—what do I do?

12: Shalabala

Anonymous

Evening Observer (Brisbane) 24 March 1902

Perhaps a humorous spoof on African adventures such as "King Solomon's Mines", or possible just a Tall Tale…

"YES," SAID JACK HAKE. "I reckon that'll fetch 'em!"

He was eying curiously a dirty brown image— a hideous Chinese idol about 4ft. high, with a face that would frighten a tiger. We had bought him dirt cheap at a store; and, frankly, I was almost afrald myself to be alone with him in the dark. He gave me the creeps.

We had fixed two electric lights behind his goggle eyes, and they shone so that a cat meeting the glare of them would have fallen in a fit, and no mistake.

"Yes," repeated Hake; "what with your ventril biz, and a man like me that knows the country and the lingo, we'll make a fortune out of him."

Now, Hake was a nigger over 6 feet high, about a yard wide, and as ugly as— But he was honest to the bone.

Well, we talked the matter over, and arranged t then and there, Hake tumbling to It in a twinkling. He knew where there was a native king with no end of ivory: the king an easy-going sort of fellow, and his tribe as quiet as lambs, who only needed to be properly handled.

I bought a mule, and wo put the idol Shalabala (as we agreed to call him) in a box with our miscellaneous luggage, loaded the patient animal with the lot, and shook hands when all was done. Then the order was, "Right away!"

it is all very well to .talk about travelling as some folks do, but our experience from the first was something cruel. We landed at Boma, near the mouth of the Congo, with all our goods safe and sound, and then rested a week looking around and studying the compass. After that we made tracks, and our troubles began.

There seemed to be nothing but rocks ahead of us, and a blazing sun, and only three drinks of decent water in forty eight hours. The ground was baked and cracked, and so hot that it blistered the soles of our feet. Five days running, we packed warm mud through a handkerchief; At last, when we stopped one evening after sunset, Hake said we must take a long rest, because in the-morning we had to push on through Zomba Pass,

"What sort of place is that?" said I.

"It just— don't ask me," said he grimly. "You'll see fast enough when we get there. Rest all you can, and drink all you can."

So I took it easy, swilled the filthy warm stuff, and fell asleep.

He woke me at down, and we started. When the sun rose it was almost too hot to live. At noon we reached the mountain range, Hake pointed to an opening in the side.

"Zomba Pass," said he,

I stared at the little elk and grunted. Zomba Pass indeed! We were pretty nearly done for before we got there— but after! Mother of Moses! Shall I ever forget it ?

It was a long, narrow passage right through the mountains; sand and scrub, and glittering rock hundreds of feet high, so white that it dazzled you to look at it.

A sort of fleecy yellow dust rose in clouds wherever you trod, and got into your eyes, into your mouth, into your nose, into your ears, and so filled the air that you had to beat with your hands and struggle for breath. As for the heat, well, I have heard of fellows being boiled or baked alive, and now I know for the first time what, that meant.

I wriggled, and writhed, and groaned aloud at every step. And there was not a sound, not a thing visible anywhere; only we two poor devils and the wretched mule shambling painfully along, and making blue shadows on the white surface of the tunnel wall.

By this time I was in such a state that I must have gone clean mad with horror and fright; Hake was staggering and reeling in front, and I was crawling on all fours. Now and then I would hear a voice singing and yelling hoarsely, and then it vaguely occurred to me that it was my own voice, and this seemed the biggest joke .going. I laughed and laughed, and then remembered nothing for a long while.

When I came to my senses I was on the mule's back. Hake had swung me. into the pack-saddle and tied me fast, so that I should not fall. Then we went forward again like a treadmill. I saw my comrade plunging through the dust; I looked round at those white rocks; I listened for a sound to break the death-like silence, till I could stand it no longer. I laughed inwardly, and shook and swelled and nearly suffocated; myself. The paroxysm passed, and left me all empty, and cold, and quiet once more.

"Hake!" I cried feebly.

He turned his face— such a face! It was not black now, but a sort of dirty gray, and a thin stream of blood trickled down from his cracked lips.

"Good-bye, mate," I whispered. "I'm going home."

He made a gesture as though imploring me to be silent, and stood still a minute with his eyes fixed on mine.

"Don't give in," he said. "Be a man now."

His courage shamed me. I tried to smile, and waved my hand to show that I understood him. After that I want screaming crazy, and when the fit was over I was so, weak I could hardly sit up.

For two hours more we pursued our drunken reel until finally; as I looked, those white walls seemed to be blotted out, and I presently found Hake leaning over me and forcing a wet rag into my mouth— the sweetest drop of water I ever tasted.

We had halted on the bank of a river that flowed away as far as we could follow it with our eyes. Hake lifted me out of the saddle and let the mule soak in the water and roll himself in the sand till he looked as fresh as a daisy. We had a rare good sleep that night.

Early next morning we unpacked the idol, and carried him down into a cave, where we set him up in a niche ;and a pretty sight he looked with his grinning, ape-like visage towering high against the bushes in the background.

Hake had gone off a quarter of a mile up country to visit old Demetro, the native king, and I was soon after introduced to the noble savage, my comrade making a speech on that occasion which, though I did not understand it, sounded mighty fine and made my ears tingle. But. It was not all smooth sailing by a long chalk! Demetro was a suspicious and cranky old beggar. We fooled around him for more than a week—I doing the popularity dodge, among his sooty subjects—before Hake could get him interested in the mysterious Shalabala, whom he pretended to have discovered on our way up from, the coast. And, after all, what really took the old codger was my doing a step-dance and yelling "Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay!” You see the business of the god sort of scared him, but mine was the real thing. He could, understand that.

At length one evening,we persuaded him to visit us at our shanty. As the sun sank slowly behind the mountain, its last rays (in the story-book style) cast a heavenly glory on Shalabala. There was the king, seated on the tree stump, with 3000 of his warriors drawn up, armed with big spears, and with shields across their breasts. They were fine, strapping fellows, black as coal.

All was quiet and still, when I began "Ta-ra," and the way Hake seconded it with the most blood-curdling, screeching made me shiver. One thing was plain. We had worked a kind of spell over our audience. They were real scared. Then I turned the idol's queer eyes on,and made him talk; A groan went up from the crowd, and down they flopped on their faces, staying there for about three minutes. Presently they all rose, shouting and throwing up their spears.

After this we were the lords of every one except the old king. He, to be sure, did not quite take to us, and in time grew downright jealous of our popularity among his people. I do believe we could have stirred up an insurrection; but, besides the crime of setting these poor niggers killing each other, Demetro had

the ivory we wanted, and that was a great deal more substantial than the mere glory of dethroning him.

He let out one day that he did not care a rap for Shalabala, and that the god of his people was good enough for him. Upon this, Hake asked if he dared to try a test with our god, and the King said, "Yes."

Then I sent this message:

“If his Majesty will challenge Shalabala to show his power, and then put his foot on the rock below the god's effigy, he will learn the truth."

The king having assented, we put twelve pounds of gunpowder under our grinning godship, and ran a train from him, all carefully laid in a trench and covered, right up to our shanty. Then we were ready.

Demetro had sent a dozen of his bodyguards to call the people together,by sound of horn, and the uproar, was deafening.

They all flocked down in a body, and every man, woman, and child was watching the king as he strutted up to Shalabala.

I could not help admiring, the old man, for it took a deal of courage for him to defy us; he did not know but what he would be a dead man in a minute. But he was as steady and full of grit as an ancient Roman....

He made a little speech as he advanced while I stood by with folded arms and a sneering face, till he stood right beneath the idol. Then there was a sound like thunder, and Shalabala vanished in a cloud of dust.

The crowd rushed in, and raised Demetro from the ground, unhurt, but in a fearful funk. And then I saw a curious thing. At the bottom of the god’s pedestal, which had been cracked asunder by the explosion, was a square stone with an iron ring in it. Hake came out of the shanty, where he had fired the train, and I pointed it out to him when he joined me, and told him to make the people disperse. He called out to them that there might be another earthquake, and they fell over one another in their hurry to get away.

Five minutes later the place was a solitude. Hake and I would risk nothing. We waited till midnight, then got a lantern, and proceeded to investigate. We lifted the stone, and discovered a hole twice the width of a man’s body, and about 8 feet deep. Hake lowered me down, first, then he jumped in, and we looked round.

We were at one end of a narrow room, and at the other was a female idol , slim-shouldered, long-waisted, and literally shining with chains and rings and bracelets, set with precious stones. Against the walls, neatly piled, were bars of silver, and behind her throne bars heavier still— gold!

For a full minute we stared at each other in a kind of stupor, hardly daring to believe our eyes. Then we turned to and gripped hands. There was no need for speech after that.

Hake got on my back and scrambled out, and soon we had rigged a sling, and loaded it with the gold and jewellery, leaving the silver behind. We toiled like galley-slaves, and the sweat ran off from us like so much water. An hour before dawn it was all hoisted up; another half-hour, and we had replaced the stone and carried the treasure safely to our shanty.

So far, so good; but the thing that troubled us now was how to escape. The tribe was so fond of our society that we were hardly ever free of them, as long as daylight lasted; besides, without their assistance it was impossible to move. We needed bearers to help us to the coast with our spoil, and we had to keep them in ignorance of the nature of that spoil if we would get clear with a sound skldg. Here was a dilemma...

Hake and I held solemn counsel together, and then informed Demetro that since Shalabala had gone to another part of the country (in disgust at the king's unbelief and the ingratitude of his people), it was our sworn duty, as his priests, to go forth and seek him, and that we wanted an escort to help us on our way.

This seemed a transparent dodge, but, bless you, he sucked it in like mother's milk! I suspect the truth was that his sable Majesty had grown thoroughly sick of the whole concern, and desired nothing better than to be quit of us. Anyhow, he closed with our offer, and not only granted as many men as we asked for, but insisted on accompanying us for the first, mile of our journey.

When it came to saying good-bye, we somehow forgot all our quarrels with the old king, and felt downright sorry to leave him and the good-natured niggers, we had had a pleasant time with them on the whole, and they were as white as anybody, barring their skins. Then we set our faces steadily to the south-east. We wanted no more of Zomba Pass, if we could help it.

Demetro sent twenty big fellows with us. It must have puzzled him to think why it took twenty men and a mule to take away what two men and a mule had brought in; but he made no remark. We were such a strange people that nothing we did was surprising.

Each of our bearers had twelve pounds of gold,and carried food for the trip on his back. They skipped merrily along. Hake took charge of the jewellery we got from the idol, and we made sure of the rest.

I had a canoe ride on Victoria Lake or Nyanza, as they, call it, where I saw fish 8ft. long that would snap at the paddles of the boat. I picked up a few curiosities there, and tried to make for Tanganyika: but the bearers grumbled, so I compromised by going to Kilima Njaro. That, by the way, is a great mountain, sticking up like a thumb, and miles and miles high. Then we struck due south, until we came to the caravan trail. We were so fortunate as to find one returning to Zanzibari,and they settled to carry our goods for a reasonable sum.

The bearers gave such an account of us that the caravan folks were afraid to approach without being asked. They had heard of Hake before, so there was no danger of any meddling with the cargo.

My partner and I divided our property, and he took ten of the gold bars, and that was all he would take. I talked and bullied him till I was hoarse, but it was simply useless. On arriving at Zanzibari, I dropped the money question, and tried to persuade him to come back to Europe with me. He would not do that either. The tears rolled down his face when we parted, but he could not bear to leave his own country, and I had no heart to blame him. He would have been tired to death in a slow place like ours. Africa's the land for things to happen; Africa's the land for me!.

13: Harold Norbey's Great Burglar

Adam McCay

1874-1947

The Xmas Bulletin, 12 Dec 1914

A humorous tale of newspaper reporting. Adam Cairns McCay was an Australian journalist, editor, writer, critic and occasional poet.

NORBEY WAS SACKED; a misfortune which for the moment seemed to him infinite disaster. It did not occur to him, except as an abstract dream of illusive comfort, that to be sacked matters little to a man 26 years old, with a nimble brain and no confirmed vices— not even a wife.

He was sacked from his job as a morning-paper reporter, if he only knew it, merely because two or three big shareholders of the *Eagle* had caught the disease of economy. That was because the other newspaper was showing a bigger net income than theirs. Which in its turn was because— but you don't want a whole cycle of reasons. The important fact is that the chief of staff had been ordered to use the knife somewhere; therefore he knifed Harold Norbey. Chiefly, because he knew in his humane heart that Norbey wouldn't stay long out of work, and wouldn't have to terrify any woman with the spectre of Want.

But Norbey didn't guess that. He thought, for he was young in his trade, that the Sack was evidence of his fundamental incapacity for newspaper work. As a matter of fact, his chief failing leaned to virtue's side. It was an imagination which was capable of inspired moments.

When Norbey told Brookes, his rival on the *Chronicle*, that he was sacked, he was profoundly miserable. He and Brookes were roundsmen. The roundsmen are they who collect the hottest, juiciest and suddenest of news— murders, conflagrations, garrottings and the like. They usually hunt in company, swapping news of small importance; but in a Big Thing they fight like devils to beat each other. The night that Norbey was sacked no Big Thing was happening.

Understand that the sack was not a cruelly immediate thing for Norbey. Newspaper offices are merciful. They give the victim a fortnight's notice, and he works for that fortnight with a cold hand round his heart, and a lump of lead in his stomach.

"What are you going to do?" Brookes asked.

"Look for a job somewhere," said Norbey. "But to-night I'm going to get drunk."

"Would like to help you," the cheerful Brookes said, "but they've jammed some Mothers' Meetings on to me to-night, and I must pick 'em up. Go and wallow. Pick me up at the Grecian's at 1 a.m., and I'll tell you what's doing, and carry you home."

The Grecian's, as everybody knows, was the all-night steak joint, kept by a degenerate descendant of Pericles, hailing from Patmos, where John had his Revelation. He had a profile which might have gone on a medal, and a shirt which should have gone into a tub.

So Norbey got drunk. It is not very difficult; and, in the circumstances, it was not very unwise. But in hours of great nervous excitement there is a dangerous kind of drunkenness. It does not merely make you noisy or soppy, according to your temperament. It simply twists your brain so that intelligence and ratiocination remain, but prudence and reason are gone. There are at least 73 ways of being drunk, and this is one of the riskiest— and best.

It is not necessary to record the experiences through which Norbey passed before he found himself sitting on a kerbstone in a quiet residential street— a street purely suburban in appearance, though not a mile from the centre of the city. Such streets are natural and necessary reserves near the brawling highways of industry; and Norbey's erratic course, before he came to the kerbstone, had been of the natural and necessary kind. He was not unhappy. His brain was weaving fancies for the future. He saw Harold Norbey reappearing, amid public excitement. as a writer from the Depths, with the Note of Reality in his work. He also saw Harold Norbey, a degraded pensioner of the worst kind, saying brilliantly bitter things to uncomprehending associates in the midst of vice and squalor. Each prospect gave him a melancholy comfort. He even began to think in metre. He was, indeed, as drunk as he had threatened to be.

But it was hard to leave the daily excitement of newspaper life. Murders! Big robberies! To be the owner of inside knowledge of things that counted! To ride, on a footplate, down to the scene of a railway smash! To go up in an aeroplane— for this sacked reporter had seen and done things! He had shared a passenger's seat on an aeroplane, only a fortnight ago, with a smart girl— dashing and plucky, swearing she would be Australia's first woman aviator. He knew her address and telephone number. He ought to have taken her to lunch. But press-men don't follow things up, unless they are News. That girl couldn't be asked to lunch now....

And, damn it, there was her house opposite to him! These semi-suburban streets are not all boarding-houses.

Her father was a big shareholder. Though Norbey didn't know, he was one of the shareholders who had economosis of the pocket. And, as Norbey did know, his daughter was one of the liveliest damsels of her city. He hated them both. The father because he held shares, the daughter because she would not now be his comrade at lunch, and she was excessively charming. He hated his newspaper because he was sacked. His brain worked through hatred to revenge with logical speed, and within 15 seconds he probably would have dragged a gate off its hinges—when things happened across the road.

Extraordinary things. The sound of loud voices and heavy feet made sudden riot in the house opposite. Its front door was flung open with a crash, and four figures appeared in the light. A fat, puffing man in pyjamas, wrestling with an athletic youth in black— and the youth wore a black mask. A pretty girl in evening dress— The Girl— dragging first at one and then at the other. A maid-servant in wild dishevelment, wringing her hands in the background. Even while the picture burned itself on Norbey's reeling brain the younger man got clear of the older, darted out of the house, and ran like a black wisp down the street.

Norbey still sat on the kerbstone. Then his eyes flashed, and he looked at his watch. It was only half-past twelve. He bounced to his feet, and ran furiously, hitting a fence or a wall at every fifteen paces.

"By Gosh !" he shouted to the third pillarbox he struck, "I'll put up such a spoof on them as they never had in their lives before!"

The reporter reached the *Eagle* office, with his brain brilliantly alive. The automatic lift swung him up into the empyrean, where he breathed " pure and inspiring ether. Once in the cupboard he called his room, he rang for a messenger, with one of those insistent, alcoholic rings.

"Tell sub-editor and printer," he jerked out, for speech was difficult though thought raced madly, "I've got a real big story— column story—fight with masked burglars at old Johnny Lowry's house. Jewellery gone. Awful plucky fight. Tell 'em it's Mary Lowry, the aeronaut. D'ye hear? Then get! *Scoot*!"

That story was written rapidly, but with a fierce love for its details. Three or four slips at a time it disappeared in the copy-runner's hands, and Norbey ran into new and lurid inventions. He made the Shareholder —John Joseph Lowry— so extraordinarily heroic that when the story was blown out he couldn't fail to be hideously ridiculous. The Shareholder seized the burglar with his hands on the spoil. They grappled in deadly embrace. The Girl Aeronaut came to the rescue. There was never a sensational detail omitted. The lie was great, glorious and convincing.

And, when proved a lie, it would cover the Shareholder, the Girl and the *Eagle* with eternal ridicule. That twisted brain had worked out a deadly vengeance on them all.

Above all, and dearer than all, he knew that the stuff was Good. Phenomenally drunk though he was, Norbey remained an artist. Otherwise, he couldn't have got drunk in just that fashion.

At the end of an hour it was a Norbey with steady feet and glittering eyes who laid the last three slips of copy on the sub-editor's desk. Fortunately for the fate of his story he didn't breathe on the sub-editor. He was an innocent sub, and it might have suffocated him.

"This the lot?" the sub asked, and Norbey nodded.

"Think we've got it to ourselves?"

"Absolute scoop," Norbey answered, and it seemed to him as if the words-were being pronounced with staccato precision by somebody five yards away from him. Then he went downstairs— and the cabman woke him up when they reached his gate.

"It's a good story," the sub said to the printer, as they stood at the little counter where the all-night porter could always find a bottle. "A hell of a good story! Fancy old Spoopendyke putting up that scrap with a masked burglar! It would do him good to be robbed. What makes it a great yarn is the girl being in it. Everybody knows her, you know. It's only a couple of weeks since Norbey wrote her up as the Coming Aeroplaniste. That's chiefly the reason why I starred the story so big. But it was a great item of news, anyhow."

"It was damn bad copy," the printer growled. "Young Norbey's copy's bad enough any time, but when you hustle him—! A column and a quarter of that stuff at two o'clock in the morning!"

"Not a real column and a quarter," the sub said appeasingly. "Remember it's got leads all the way through."

From which brief dialogue it will be seen that Norbey's intoxicated brain had achieved its revenge well and truly, and under serious physical disabilities.

THE GREAT ADVANTAGE of telling a story after the event is that you can relate, with knowledge, what happened on each side of a shut door.

Mary Lowry, only daughter of the magnate irreverently called Old Spoopendyke by a sub-editor, might easily go to a Masked Cinderella under lax chaperonage, for she had no mother to go with her. Being unconventional, she might easily come home under male escort; and if a French window was left unlocked for her by her maid, there is no reason why the escort should not come into the house with her, to talk a few minutes longer. They might even converse in her own pet little sitting-room, "in all honor," as the smug Tennyson remarks. But no amount of unconventionality will excuse such a disturbance of furniture as will awaken a heavy father who has all the pugnacious instincts of a money-making man.

When the loud, blundering footsteps of old Lowry, or Spoopendyke, were heard in the passage-way, Charlie Meyer, the aeronaut, did the only possible thing. He pushed the dismayed girl into the nearest door— it happened to be the door of her bedroom. He pulled his coat rapidly-over his evening dress, whipped a black mask from his pocket, and crushed hat and mask together on his head and face. Aeronauting teaches men to think quickly. Then, as Lowry rushed in, Meyer rushed out. But the old man got hold of the flying skirt of his coat.

Mary did the wildest thing imaginable— she squealed. So she woke her maid. The maid was out of bed in time to hear an avalanche, or a dog fight, or

something of the sort doing a sensational waltz act down the stairway, and to switch on every light she could find. Then Mary stopped squealing. She volplaned downstairs, with the maid behind her.

The next bit of the melodrama was what Norbey saw before he bolted. While he was colliding with pillar-boxes, and neglecting to apologise, the Lowry family and the Lowry maid were in Mary's sitting-room. Mary was recovering from hysteria on the sofa. The maid Louise was busy at a dressing-table, on which there was a tray of miscellaneous jewellery.

"Stop that!" Lowry commanded. "Louise, is anything missing?"

"I am afraid," said the maid, standing with her hands behind her, "two or three of Miss Mary's rings"

"All right, go to bed," Lowry said fiercely. "No; don't go at once. Ring up the police."

Louise left the room, with her hands in front of her.

A little later a senior-constable with a large, yellow moustache, was sitting in the room, trying to write in a black book, with a stubby pencil, a verbatim statement of what Lowry was saying to him. In the end Lowry roared, and said that he would wait for the detective police next day. But the senior-constable was useful. He found two of the three missing rings. They were on the hall floor, not far from the telephone box. Louise had not dared to throw them far. Rings make a lot of noise, if thrown from a distance on to a polished floor.

"Dropped in the scuffle," the policeman remarked sagaciously.

A scared, dazed Harold Norbey opened his newspaper next morning with a hand that shook, and read it with a glassy eye, while his vital organs slowly sank until they slid away through his boots. Oh, that accusing morning moment of recollection and realisation!

It is a serious thing to sell a newspaper in that fashion. To be careless and irresponsible is a trifle. That ends by giving the reporter great experience and confidence, for it makes it absolutely certain that he will travel happily and by stages round the English-speaking world— Australia, Britain, Canada, Maoriland and the United States. He may shift from newspaper to newspaper without trouble. But to misuse your paper brings the black mark which is eternal damnation. Seeing that wildly dramatic column in irrevocable print, Norbey knew that now, henceforth and for ever had he closed to himself every door of journalism that is worth entering.

Doomed and repentant, he went into the city with the exact feelings of a man who is off to say good-morning to his executioner. He felt stifled, until the thing should be over. His steps went straight to the *Eagle* office, terribly though he needed a drink. No letter of summons awaited him in his room. Well, he would sit down until the letter came. He opened his various receptacles and

began to look through them mechanically... A boy from the sub-editor's room appeared. So it had come.

"Wanted downstairs," the boy said in the laconic language of his kind. "Sent to look for you."

The sub-editor was in the sub-editor's room. So was the chief of staff. So was John Joseph Lowry, Esq. Norbey marched into the room feeling as if his head was already on a charger.

"What has caused my wonder," Lowry was saying ponderously, "was the exact accuracy of the story. I could never have believed that that ass of a policeman took my information in so well. Why, every detail of the fight is there. 'Pon my soul, I don't want to brag, but I dealt with the fellow; my word I did. If this is the young man, I congratulate him on his quick grip and his ready pen. He might have been there!— from the very moment I saw the villain grabbing the jewellery, and seized him by the throat— but there, there, I mustn't boast. The police ought to get the scoundrel. He'll have my marks on him sure enough. You got the tale from the policeman, hey?"

Norbey was silent.

"Ho, ho!" the magnate smiled largely. "Never give anybody away; is that it? Well, it's a sound rule. But without disparaging Miss Lowry, who was plucky enough, no doubt, your account rather over-draws the part she played when I was forcing him to unmask. To tell you the truth, she was rather in the way just then. But your description of his features is accurate. I remembered him even more distinctly when I read my paper to-day. The police tell me that the description corresponds very closely with that of a most notorious criminal whom they have watched for a long time."

"Yes, I guessed they would say that," Norbey answered evenly.

"Hey? You know these villains, too, I dare say," Lowry chuckled. "Sleuths of the press! Sleuths of the press! I think some of our men could show the Detective Office the way round. Hey?"

"We're so-so, Mr. Lowry," said the chief of staff. And somehow at that moment Norbey knew that he wasn't going to be sacked. It was, by the way, the Assistant Shipping Reporter who went instead. He became an insurance agent, and his two boys were soon adepts with office brooms.

Various persons think various thoughts as the result of this brief series of incidents. Mary Lowry thinks that Charlie Meyer is the coolest and cleverest man in the world, and admires most of all the stroke of genius which made him carry the rings from her dressing-table to the hall floor. But she is sorry that the prettiest ring of all disappeared. She believes that the policeman got it.

Charlie Meyer thinks that aeroplaning is safer than society experience.

John Joseph Lowry thinks that every man who looks at him in the street is a potential burglar, deterred from entering his house by knowledge of his exploits.

Louise thinks, concerning Mary Lowry, the kind of things which become familiar as evidence when maids appear as divorce-court witnesses. She also thinks, and says to her betrothed: "How lucky that I was able to get the ring honestly, when I was so often tempted to steal it!"

Brookes, who on that nigrht smuggled two or three small items to the *Eagle* by a friendly hand, thinks that Norbey is a dirty thief with whom it is unsafe to work on terms of trust.

The Detective Office thinks that the uniformed policeman deliberately kept it in ignorance, in order to get the limelight in the *Eagle*'s report.

William David Davis, aged 43, Anglican, tattoo on left arm, gaol number thinks that it is a bewildering and a cursed thing to get two years for a job you knew nothing about until you saw it in the papers. He is convinced that alibi evidence, however true, is no good if the cops are against you.

The copy-boy, who knows that burglaries which happen at 12.30 a.m. cannot possibly be circumstantially described in an edition which goes to press at 1.45 a.m., thinks scandalous romance concerning Harold Norbey and Mary Lowry, each of whom he secretly adores.

What Harold Norbey thinks may be judged from what he said, the night before last, to a cub reporter on the *Eagle*. The cub, fresh from a scene of slaughter, complained that he had got a "rotten" interview from an eye-witness. Whereupon Norbey ordered him to write the interview afresh, and added:—

The memory of an excited man is a queer thing, my son. What he will read in the paper to-morrow morning will print itself more deeply on his mind than what he saw to-night. Always remember that, my tender suckling, when you are on a Real Big Sensation.

"So I can grow up to be His Royal High Swankiness, like Lord Norbey," the cub sneered, after Norbey had left the room.

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14: The Adventuress

Arthur Gask

1869-1951

The Chronicle (Adelaide) 30 Oct 1941

THE BABY HAD BEEN HUSHED TO SLEEP, and, with one last lingering look of adoration, the young mother moved very softly over to her desk and sat down to write. She was very pretty, so young, it seemed, to have maternal cares, but as she looked round at the luxuriously appointed room she gave a sigh of deep contentment. Fortune, she knew, had indeed been kind to her! She had everything she could want!

She picked up her pen and continued her interrupted letter. "No, Nancy dear," she wrote, "I never forget I have a cousin in far-off England, although I have not seen her for fifteen years. You left Australia just after mother died, and I was only seven then.

"Yesterday was the first anniversary of our wedding, and I am so happy. Of course everyone said I had made a great catch, but it was a real love-match, and I would have married John if he hadn't had a penny. You will have heard I was working in a café before I was married to him, but that makes no difference to what he thinks of me, and we are devoted to each other.

"Yes, it was a real romance, and I'll tell you all about it from the very beginning when it started, less than eighteen months ago. When poor father died at the beginning of last year we two girls were left almost penniless, and we came up to the city at once to find some way of earning our own living. Hilda got a situation with a kindly old lawyer, but I had no luck at all. Trade happened to be very bad at the time, and the shops wouldn't engage an inexperienced hand when plenty of experienced ones were available. In the offices it was the same. Being nearly twenty-one, I was too old to start as a learner, and the registry offices could supply properly trained clerks to anyone who wanted them.

"One morning, when almost in desperation because funds were getting so low, I saw an advertisement in one of the newspapers for a waitress in a café, and I went after the situation at once. I hated the idea of being a waitress, but what could I do?

"Arriving at the café I found there were a lot of girls waiting to be interviewed, and thought dismally I should have very little chance. However, directly my turn came and I was taken into the proprietress, a Mrs. Lewis, I felt much more hopeful. She had a very kind face, and was undoubtedly a lady. She eyed me critically, and at once started to ask me all sorts of questions about myself, very quickly and without wasting a moment of time. Finally, she said smilingly, 'Well, although you've had no experience, I'll give you a trial. You're

pretty, and that counts a lot. Besides, the work can easily be picked up by anyone of ordinary intelligence.' 'But what are the wages?' I asked timidly. 'One pound a week,' she replied, and then, seeing my face fall, as well it might, considering I was paying 22/6 at the boarding house, she added quickly, 'But then, you ought to make as much again or that in tips. My customers are all of a good class, professional men and heads of business houses, and they are most of them quite generous. The charges here are high to keep the place select.' She spoke warningly. 'But you take care of yourself and keep everybody at a distance. There are always plenty of pitfalls in a city for pretty girls.'

"There were four other waitresses, and they soon put me in the way of things. I felt very nervous at first, but in a few days flattered myself I was as quick and competent as anyone. Most of our customers were elderly, but there was a fair sprinkling of younger men. They all seemed well-to-do and, to my great delight, the first week I made over 35/ in tips. It wasn't a nice feeling, taking the sixpences and threepences at first, but I soon got over it and regarded it as quite the natural thing. A number of those I served, both young and elderly, were often inclined to be friendly, but I treated them all the same and never encouraged any conversation when it began to get personal.

"Mrs. Lewis had the eyes of a hawk, and always seemed to know what was going on. 'That's right, my dear,' she said to me one day, 'never make yourself too cheap and they'll think the more of you.'

"I had been there about a month when one morning John came in, and I thought at once that I had met my fate. He looked so handsome and carried himself so boldly and confidently that I was interested in him at once. His eyes roved round the room and then, to my great delight, he came and sat down at one of my tables. 'Hullo,' he exclaimed smilingly, 'and so you're the new star they've got here. I've heard about you and that they call you the duchess.'

"But I only just smiled back and, having brought what he had ordered, moved away. Then I was thrilled to notice that several times he was looking in my direction. When he left he gave me a smiling nod, and I found he had put sixpence under the plate for me.

"Oh, Nancy, that sixpence made me feel so miserable! It woke me with a horrible thunderclap from my beautiful day dream of meeting my Prince Charming while working in that café, for then, for the first time, I realised the great gulf which must always stretch between me and those to whom I was carrying what they had ordered to eat and drink. What a little fool I had been all along, for how could I have ever thought that any man would want to pick for his wife a girl who had been taking threepences and sixpences from everyone who offered them!

"I felt miserably unhappy for the rest of that day, but that night, when I was undressing, all my pride and courage suddenly came back and I felt quite

hopeful once again. At any rate, I told myself I would be no easy conquest for anyone and, if I fell in love with this boy and he with me, it would be through the marriage vows alone that I would go to him.

"The next morning John appeared in the café again and my foolish heart started to go pit-a-pat immediately. As I had been sure he would, he came straight to my tables, and smiled as charmingly at me as he had done the day before. But I had got myself well in hand and waited upon him demurely, giving him no idea of how interested I was in him. By then I had learnt from the other girls that he was John McCairne, the only son of old Hugh McCairne, who was very wealthy and owned one of the largest sheep stations in Australia.

"Then John took to coming regularly to the Rialto whenever, as he explained, he was down in the city. 'Mind your steps, young woman,' nodded Mrs. Lewis, who was taking in everything. 'That man likes pretty girls, but he's only a flirt. Lots of society mothers have tried to get him for their daughters, but they've all failed. Besides, he's not likely to mean anything serious with you, even if he were a marrying man.' I only smiled, but when one day he asked me to come out for the evening, with the plan I had mapped out, I shook my head. 'But why not?' he asked with a frown. 'You say you've got no boy friend, so where'll be the harm?' "

" 'I don't know you well enough,' I laughed. 'I'm not a prude, but I don't go out with everyone.'

"He looked annoyed and then didn't come near the Rialto for a whole week, although I had heard he was in the city. Then, when he did resume his visits, he renewed his invitation every time. At last I agreed, and it was arranged he should take me to the pictures.

"It was a thrilling moment for me when I met him outside the Theatre Royal, for it was the first time he had seen me when not in my waitress's uniform. But, hoping for such an occasion, I had been preparing for it for a long time, and, indeed, had spent down to my last pound to have every thing ready.

"Never mind what I wore, but it was all good, and Hilda, who saw me off, was positive I looked as well-dressed as any girl in the city could want to be. John told me afterwards that he drew in a deep breath when he caught sight of me, but all he said then was, 'My word, but you do look nice! Why, you're a real little beauty!'

"He was very nice and polite all the evening, and not a bit forward, and I enjoyed everything immensely. He drove me home in his car, which I did not altogether like, because our boarding-house looked so shabby. When we said good-bye we just shook hands, but he squeezed mine ever so slightly.

"Then commenced a most happy time for me. Whenever he was down in the city he used to take me out twice and even three times during the week. He had

kissed me now, and I had kissed him back, but I took care the kisses should be always short ones and allowed no lingering over them.

"One night, when we were together in his car upon one of the beaches he kissed me, and then suddenly put his arm round my waist and made to pull me tightly to him. But I disengaged myself instantly, and said very sharply, 'No, John, I won't have it, and if you try that again I won't come out with you any more.'

" 'Why not?' he asked in an equally as sharp a tone as I had used, and I could see that he was inclined to be really angry.

" 'Because I don't think people should embrace unless things are serious between them,' I replied warmly.

" 'Ho, ho, then you are not serious with me!' he exclaimed, and there was just a trace of sarcasm in his tones.

"I shook my head. 'Not yet,' I laughed teasingly. 'I'm trying you out, and I'm not quite certain about you.' I nodded. 'There are several things about you which don't please me. For one thing, you have too many whiskies and sodas for a man of your age. They are not good for you.'

"He reddened furiously, and stared in astonishment. Then a long silence followed, and it was quite five minutes before either of us spoke again. Then he said smilingly, 'Well, you're either a very wise young woman or else a very cold one. I can't quite make out which.'

" 'I'm neither,' I smiled back. I became serious. 'I'm just a girl who intends to go to her real lover as God made her, and not with any secrets she'll be always having to hide.'

" 'Hum,' he remarked thoughtfully, 'you're dangerous, and I see I shall have to be very careful.' But for all that, his goodnight kiss would have been warmer if I had let it be.

"Then things began to move quickly towards a climax. One afternoon about 3 o'clock and during the slack time when there were few people in the café, a tall, erect man midway between sixty and seventy, I thought, came in and, after a good look round, walked over and sat down at a table near where I was standing. His distinguished, handsome face seemed somehow familiar to me. He regarded me curiously as he asked curtly for coffee and toast and, when I had served him and was attending to other customers, I saw his eyes were following me round. Presently, when at his request I made out his docket, he handed me a one pound note, and then when I returned him his 19 shillings in change, he pushed a two-shilling piece towards me over the table. 'Too much,' I smiled, laying down a shilling and sixpence.

" 'Oh, that's it, is it?' he said with his face puckered up into a frown. He spoke scornfully, 'To kind of let me know, I suppose, that the two shillings wouldn't get me any forwarder, and that you preferred younger men.' Then, before I could take in what he meant, he went on very sharply, 'Here, young

woman, my name's Hugh McCairne, and I want to know what you think is going to be the end of your going about with my boy.'

"My breath caught in my throat. Now, I realised why his face had seemed familiar. Of course, he was John's father! I could feel myself getting hot all over.

"He went on quickly, raising his voice, 'Yes, you may well blush, but it's about time you thought where things were leading you. With any sense, you must see—'

"'Hush, hush,' I exclaimed sharply, because some of the other customers were beginning to look round in our direction, 'this is not the place to discuss it!' I spoke with some indignation, 'Please, remember I have my living to get here, and you are attracting attention. If you want to speak to me it can be done somewhere else.'

"He calmed down at once. 'Well, will you meet me tonight at my hotel, the Semiris, at 7 o'clock?' he asked curtly. I hesitated, but I had got all my wits about me now, and was perfectly cool and collected. 'And I suppose that means you are asking me to dinner,' I said thoughtfully.

"He raised his eyebrows as if rather surprised and smiled coldly. 'All right,' he nodded. 'I'll give you something to eat. Then it's to be 7 o'clock and don't you be late, as I hate unpunctuality.'

"Now Nancy, my dear old father-in-law will have it that everything I did that night was done of deliberate purpose to entrap him. But if he is right, I only wanted to make him realise that, if ever John did ask me, I was quite nice enough to be his wife. The Semiris, of course, you remember, is about the most fashionable hotel in town, and I learnt afterwards that Mr. McCairne had never intended for one moment to take me to dinner there. Instead, he had meant to go to some quiet little place where it was not likely he would be recognised in my company. So when I arrived at the Semiris, he was waiting outside, all ready to whisk me away quickly before anybody had noticed our meeting.

"But when he saw me very nicely dressed and quite presentable— he didn't recognise me at first— after a moment's hesitation he changed his mind and with a grim and purposeful face took me into the big dining hall of the hotel.

"He did not seem too pleased, however, when we were given a table in the very centre of the room, but the place was crowded and that happened to be the only table available. When we were seated, he looked round frowningly and nodded to some men he knew, but in a few moments he turned back to me and his face broke into a rather reluctant smile. 'Gad, you're good-looking all right, Miss Trevor!' he exclaimed. 'I'll admit that. You're by far the prettiest girl here, and are making quite a lot of interest.' He chuckled, 'There are two friends of mine close near, all eyes and ears for what's going on, and won't they just have a tale to tell about me!' He made a grimace. 'I hope to goodness I get home before they do, to explain everything to my wife.'

"Then, all suddenly, his manner became most friendly. 'Now will you have a cocktail?' he asked. 'Oh, you won't! You want to keep your complexion, do you? Well, it's certainly worth keeping! But what would you like to drink? What, claret! Why, I quite thought you'd choose champagne!' He frowned. 'Has my son ever given you champagne?'

" 'He's offered it, but I've refused,' I smiled. I had determined upon my line of action and spoke boldly. 'That's one thing I've talked to John about,' I went on. 'He has far too many nice things to drink. Never, of course, more than he can take easily, but more than are good for a boy of his age.'

"Mr. McCairne fairly gasped. 'But you've got a nerve, haven't you,' he exclaimed, 'talking as if you had some proprietary interest in my son?' He glared at me. 'What are your intentions, young woman?' He could hardly get his breath. 'Do you think he's going to marry you?'

"I interested myself in my fish for quite a minute before replying. Then I said rather hesitatingly, 'I don't quite know, Mr. McCairne. We've neither of us made up our minds yet.' I laughed. 'I'm not quite certain I should accept him, even if he proposed.'

"Mr. McCairne gulped down his astonishment and pretended to be very amused. 'And you a waitress in a café,' he exclaimed, 'in part depending upon your livelihood upon tips!'

" 'That's nothing,' I said coolly. 'You were only a station hand once, probably earning far less than I am. Why are you proud of telling people how you have worked your way up!'

"He bowed ironically. 'A hit, Miss Trevor, a good hit!' he exclaimed. He nodded frowningly. 'Yes, you're a clever young woman, and I see my boy will have to look out!'

" 'But why should he have to look out?' I asked warmly. 'Why should it be wrong if he wanted me to be his wife? You say I'm quite presentable! Well, I'm educated and I come of good stock. My father was a doctor.' I spoke with some sharpness. 'What do you find wrong about me?' He made no answer, and, the waiter coming to change our plates, quite a long silence ensued. 'Well,' I asked at last, 'can't you think of anything wrong?'

"I saw I had driven him into a corner, and he smiled and shook his head. 'Not for the moment,' he replied. He sighed. 'But come, let's talk about something else.'

"So we started upon quite an interesting conversation, chiefly about ourselves. He told me about his early struggles and how he had gradually made his way, and I told him of my life as a doctor's daughter in a small bush town and, humorously, of my adventures when looking for a situation in the city. The conversation was continued after dinner in the lounge, and ten o'clock came

before either of us had realised how quickly the time had flown. Then I said I must be going home. Mr. McCairne made a grimace.

" 'Look here, my dear,' he said, 'you've hypnotised me, and I really don't know what to say about you and John.' He smiled with mock resignation. 'I think you'd better come and spend a weekend with us at Riverdale. Then we'll see what John's mother thinks about you. Now, would you like to come?'

"My legs went all wobbly, but I pulled myself together and said I'd like to, very much. 'But I think you might very nicely ask my sister as well,' I went on. 'Then it won't look so obvious that I am being brought down for inspection.'

" 'A good idea!' he exclaimed. The grim look returned to his face. 'And then we'll be able to see what the other member of the family is like. Riverdale is only just over a hundred miles from the city, and John can bring you both down.'

" 'But one thing, please, Mr. McCairne,' I said. 'I'd like you to invite me openly in front of John. He'll be up in the city tomorrow, won't he? Well, he'll most likely come to the Rialto about eleven. So you appear a few minutes after.

" 'You little schemer!' he exclaimed with mock severity. 'You'll be trying to run the whole family soon.' He nodded, 'Still, I'll do as you suggest.' Then he added as an afterthought, 'but I don't think we'd better say anything to John, at any rate, for the present, about our having met here tonight. I'll tell him myself later on.'

"The next morning John came into the Rialto rather later than I expected, and we had had only just time to say a few words when Mr. McCairne appeared and came straight up to us.

" 'Ha, ha, my boy,' he exclaimed, shaking a finger reprovingly. 'I've found out at last what has been bringing you down so often to the city! No, no, you needn't introduce us. I came in yesterday and had a little chat with this young lady.'

"John's face was a study, and for the moment he seemed downright annoyed, but then his easy smile came back, and, thinking I must be brightened,?? he nodded reassuringly to me. 'It's all right, Helen,' he said, 'my father's a dear old fellow, and you needn't be in the least bit afraid of him.'

" 'Afraid of me!' laughed the old man, as if it were a good joke. 'Why, the boot's on the other foot. I'm the one to be afraid of a girl with eyes like hers.'

"I left them together and did not return to their table until they were getting up to leave. Then, in saying good-bye, Mr. McCairne gave me the invitation for the following Friday.

"Oh, Nancy, that weekend was such a triumph for me! John's mother took to me at once, and treated me as if I were a most honored guest. She was a sweet old lady and not a bit stuck-up. John was very quiet and didn't say much, but I could see he was proud of me, and very pleased with the way things were going. Strangely enough, although we were left a lot together that weekend our love-

making was very restrained, on my part because I had no intention of letting John think I took anything for granted, and upon his, because, as he told me afterwards, he never liked things to be arranged for him, and he thought his parents were doing it then.

"On the Sunday night, just before we got ready to go back to the city, Mr. McCairne drew me to one side. 'Look here, little woman,' he said, 'both the wife and I are very happy about everything, and would like to see you and John come to an understanding. But you must first get to thoroughly know your own minds, and so what I suggest is this. Hand in your notice to the Rialto at once, and then come here as my secretary and companion to my wife. I'll give you £100 a year, and if you and my boy don't finally hit it off'— he shook his finger at me— 'then, you little adventuress, I'll look out for a husband for you somewhere else. Yes, you can kiss me if you like, but I'm sure it won't be one like those you give John.' You can imagine how thrilled I was.

"I went to them a fortnight afterwards, and things could not have been happier for me. John was most attentive and made very few trips to the city, and then only when he was absolutely obliged to go. I was more in love with him than ever, and we seemed to be drifting into a matter-of-course engagement.

"But suddenly a dreadful thing happened, and if I hadn't acted as the bold little adventuress they all laughingly pretended me to be. I might have lost John altogether.

"All at once John became cold towards me. He didn't want to kiss me any more, and, as much as possible, avoided being alone with me. He took to stopping up in the city, too, for two and even three days at a time, and altogether it was quite plain to everybody that he was intending to drop me.

"His father and mother were most upset, but they said nothing to me, and, of course, I was much too proud to refer to it. I felt terribly hurt, but tried not to let anyone see it, and, outwardly, was just as smiling and bright as before.

"Then one night at dinner John suddenly announced he was going for a trip to Colombo and sailing the following week. He explained he wanted a change, and was sure the voyage would do him good.

"Mr. and Mrs. McCairne looked dumbfounded and didn't say a word, but I made myself appear to be most interested and asked him all sorts of questions about the voyage and what the boat he was going in was like. I was as happy about it as if I were going myself. After dinner, however, when without a word he left the room, I followed him. 'Here, John,' I said firmly, 'I want to speak to you. Come out into the garden.'

He frowned and hesitated, but my manner was insistent and he came after me. I led him into the summer house just across the lawn. My heart was beating like a sledge hammer, but I held myself well in hand.

" 'Sit down,' I said, and seating myself down, too, but well away from him, I went on sharply, 'Now, I want an explanation, please, and it's not only myself I'm thinking of but of your father and mother as well. You must see how you're upsetting them.' I spoke disdainfully. 'What does it all mean?'

" 'What does what all mean?' he echoed, making out he was surprised at my question.

" 'Oh, don't pretend you don't know,' I retorted angrily. 'Something's turned you against me and it's a week since you've offered to kiss me. You avoid me, too, as if I were something hateful. What's happened?'

"He regarded me very coldly. 'I don't like girls,' he said slowly, and holding my eyes with his, 'who make out they're so straight and proper and then, when it suits them, carry on in a way which suggests the exact opposite.'

" 'Meaning me?' I asked incredulously.

" 'Who else?' he scoffed. Then he rapped out fiercely, 'Who was that old man you were seen sitting with in the lounge of the Semiris Hotel, one night, late, a little while before you came up here?'

"I gasped and, so overwhelming was my relief, I could not speak. Instead, I threw back my head and burst into nervous but rippling laughter. 'Oh, you foolish boy,' I cried, 'and so it's that which has been making you behave all this time like a sulky child?' I was trembling all over and could not keep my voice from shaking. 'Why, hasn't your dad ever told you? It was he who took me to the Semiris that night and—' but I broke down and burst into tears.

"John had his arms round me in two seconds. 'No, no, you shall never kiss me again,' I cried furiously. 'You've doubted me and—'

"But with his face pressed so close to mine I could not get out another word. I just closed my eyes and the next few minutes were among the very happiest in all my life.

"And you just understand, you little witch, that I'll be kissing you now for keeps,' he said masterfully, when at last he let me free to smooth down my dishevelled hair. He pulled me to him again and his voice dropped tenderly. 'Oh, I'm so ashamed of myself. I'll never doubt you again.'

"Presently we went back into the house and his father's face broke into a delighted smile as he saw us walking so close together, with John holding tightly to my hand.

" 'But what's happened?' gasped his mother, with her eyes opened very wide.

" 'Oh, nothing much,' laughed John. He bent down and kissed me shamelessly in front of them. 'Only that this young woman here has just asked me to be her husband and, to save argument, I've consented.'

" 'Oh, you story-teller!' I protested vehemently. 'I did nothing of the kind,' but both his parents pretended not to believe me.

"Six weeks later we were married, and I know I had the very loveliest honeymoon any girl could have ever had. But I must finish now, for I hear John's car in the drive and want to seal this letter up, so that he cannot suggest he should read what I've been writing about. He'd only laugh and say it was at last the frank confession of his little adventuress. So, with heaps of love until I write again,

"Your affectionate cousin,

"Helen McCairne."

15: The Governor of St. Kitt's

Arthur Conan Doyle

1859-1930

Pearson's Magazine, Jan 1897

Collected in: *The Green Flag*, 1900

WHEN THE GREAT WARS of the Spanish Succession had been brought to an end by the Treaty of Utrecht, the vast number of privateers which had been fitted out by the contending parties found their occupation gone. Some took to the more peaceful but less lucrative ways of ordinary commerce, others were absorbed into the fishing fleets, and a few of the more reckless hoisted the Jolly Rodger at the mizzen, and the bloody flag at the main, declaring a private war upon their own account against the whole human race.

With mixed crews, recruited from every nation, they scoured the seas, disappearing occasionally to careen in some lonely inlet, or putting in for a debauch at some outlying port, where they dazzled the inhabitants by their lavishness, and horrified them by their brutalities.

On the Coromandel Coast, at Madagascar, in the African waters, and above all in the West Indian and American seas, the pirates were a constant menace. With an insolent luxury they would regulate their depredations by the comfort of the seasons, harrying New England in the summer, and dropping south again to the tropical islands in the winter.

They were the more to be dreaded because they had none of that discipline and restraint which made their predecessors, the Buccaneers, both formidable and respectable. These Ishmaels of the sea rendered an account to no man, and treated their prisoners according to the drunken whim of the moment. Flashes of grotesque generosity alternated with longer stretches of inconceivable ferocity, and the skipper who fell into their hands might find himself dismissed with his cargo, after serving as boon companion in some hideous debauch, or might sit at his cabin table with his own nose and his lips served up with pepper and salt in front of him. It took a stout seaman in those days to ply his calling in the Caribbean Gulf.

Such a man was Captain John Scarrow, of the ship *Morning Star*, and yet he breathed a long sigh of relief when he heard the splash of the falling anchor and swung at his moorings within a hundred yards of the guns of the citadel of Basseterre. St. Kitt's was his final port of call, and early next morning his bowsprit would be pointed for Old England. He had had enough of those robber-haunted seas. Ever since he had left Maracaibo upon the Main, with his full lading of sugar and red pepper, he had winced at every topsail which glimmered over the violet edge of the tropical sea. He had coasted up the Windward

Islands, touching here and there, and assailed continually by stories of villainy and outrage.

Captain Sharkey, of the twenty-gun pirate barque, *Happy Delivery*, had passed down the coast, and had littered it with gutted vessels and with murdered men. Dreadful anecdotes were current of his grim pleasantries and of his inflexible ferocity. From the Bahamas to the Main his coal-black barque, with the ambiguous name, had been freighted with death and many things which are worse than death. So nervous was Captain Scarrow, with his new full-rigged ship, and her full and valuable lading, that he struck out to the west as far as Bird's Island to be out of the usual track of commerce. And yet even in those solitary waters he had been unable to shake off sinister traces of Captain Sharkey.

One morning they had raised a single skiff adrift upon the face of the ocean. Its only occupant was a delirious seaman, who yelled hoarsely as they hoisted him aboard, and showed a dried-up tongue like a black and wrinkled fungus at the back of his mouth. Water and nursing soon transformed him into the strongest and smartest sailor on the ship. He was from Marblehead, in New England, it seemed, and was the sole survivor of a schooner which had been scuttled by the dreadful Sharkey.

For a week Hiram Evanson, for that was his name, had been adrift beneath a tropical sun. Sharkey had ordered the mangled remains of his late captain to be thrown into the boat, "as provisions for the voyage," but the seaman had at once committed it to the deep, lest the temptation should be more than he could bear. He had lived upon his own huge frame until, at the last moment, the *Morning Star* had found him in that madness which is the precursor of such a death. It was no bad find for Captain Scarrow, for, with a short-handed crew, such a seaman as this big New Englander was a prize worth having. He vowed that he was the only man whom Captain Sharkey had ever placed under an obligation.

Now that they lay under the guns of Basseterre, all danger from the pirate was at an end, and yet the thought of him lay heavily upon the seaman's mind as he watched the agent's boat shooting out from the Custom-house quay.

"I'll lay you a wager, Morgan," said he to the first mate, "that the agent will speak of Sharkey in the first hundred words that pass his lips."

"Well, captain, I'll have you a silver dollar, and chance it," said the rough old Bristol man beside him.

The negro rowers shot the boat alongside, and the linen-clad steersman sprang up the ladder. "Welcome, Captain Scarrow!" he cried. "Have you heard about Sharkey?"

The captain grinned at the mate.

"What devilry has he been up to now?" he asked.

"Devilry!You've not heard, then? Why, we've got him safe under lock and key at Basseterre. He was tried last Wednesday, and he is to be hanged to-morrow morning."

Captain and mate gave a shout of joy, which an instant later was taken up by the crew. Discipline was forgotten as they scrambled up through the break of the poop to hear the news. The New Englander was in the front of them with a radiant face turned up to Heaven, for he came of the Puritan stock.

"Sharkey to be hanged!" he cried. "You don't know, Master Agent, if they lack a hangman, do you?"

"Stand back!" cried the mate, whose outraged sense of discipline was even stronger than his interest at the news. "I'll pay that dollar, Captain Scarrow, with the lightest heart that ever I paid a wager yet. How came the villain to be taken?"

"Why, as to that, he became more than his own comrades could abide, and they took such a horror of him that they would not have him on the ship. So they marooned him upon the Little Mangles to the south of the Mysteriosa Bank, and there he was found by a Portobello trader, who brought him in. There was talk of sending him to Jamaica to be tried, but our good little Governor, Sir Charles Ewan, would not hear of it. 'He's my meat,' said he, 'and I claim the cooking of it. 'If you can stay till to-morrow morning at ten, you'll see the joint swinging."

"I wish I could," said the captain, wistfully, "but I am sadly behind time now. I should start with the evening tide."

"That you can't do," said the agent with decision. "The Governor is going back with you."

"The Governor!"

"Yes. He's had a dispatch from Government to return without delay. The fly-boat that brought it has gone on to Virginia. So Sir Charles has been waiting for you, as I told him you were due before the rains."

"Well, well!" cried the captain in some perplexity, "I'm a plain seaman, and I don't know much of governors and baronets and their ways. I don't remember that I ever so much as spoke to one. But if it's in King George's service, and he asks a cast in the *Morning Star* as far as London, I'll do what I can for him. There's my own cabin he can have and welcome. As to the cooking, it's lobscouse and salmagundy six days in the week; but he can bring his own cook aboard with him if he thinks our galley too rough for his taste. "

"You need not trouble your mind, Captain Scarrow," said the agent. "Sir Charles is in weak health just now, only clear of a quartan ague, and it is likely he will keep his cabin most of the voyage. Dr. Larousse said that he would have sunk had the hanging of Sharkey not put fresh life into him. He has a great spirit

in him, though, and you must not blame him if he is somewhat short in his speech."

"He may say what he likes, and do what he likes, so long as he does not come athwart my hawse when I am working the ship," said the captain. "He is Governor of St. Kitt's, but I am Governor of the *Morning Star*, and, by his leave, I must weigh with the first tide, for I owe a duty to my employer, just as he does to King George."

"He can scarce be ready to-night, for he has many things to set in order before he leaves."

"The early morning tide, then. "

"Very good. I shall send his things aboard to-night; and he will follow them to-morrow early if I can prevail upon him to leave St. Kitt's without seeing Sharkey do the rogue's hornpipe. His own orders were instant, so it may be that he will come at once. It is likely that Dr. Larousse may attend him upon the journey."

Left to themselves, the captain and mate made the best preparations which they could for their illustrious passenger. The largest cabin was turned out and adorned in his honour, and orders were given by which barrels of fruit and some cases of wine should be brought off to vary the plain food of an ocean-going trader. In the evening the Governor's baggage began to arrive—great iron-bound ant-proof trunks, and official tin packing-cases, with other strange-shaped packages, which suggested the cocked hat or the sword within. And then there came a note, with a heraldic device upon the big red seal, to say that Sir Charles Ewan made his compliments to Captain Scarrow, and that he hoped to be with him in the morning as early as his duties and his infirmities would permit.

He was as good as his word, for the first grey of dawn had hardly begun to deepen into pink when he was brought alongside, and climbed with some difficulty up the ladder. The captain had heard that the Governor was an eccentric, but he was hardly prepared for the curious figure who came limping feebly down his quarter-deck, his steps supported by a thick bamboo cane. He wore a Ramillies wig, all twisted into little tails like a poodle's coat, and cut so low across the brow that the large green glasses which covered his eyes looked as if they were hung from it. A fierce beak of a nose, very long and very thin, cut the air in front of him. His ague had caused him to swathe his throat and chin with a broad linen cravat, and he wore a loose damask powdering-gown secured by a cord round the waist. As he advanced he carried his masterful nose high in the air, but his head turned slowly from side to side in the helpless manner of the purblind, and he called in a high, querulous voice for the captain.

"You have my things?" he asked.

"Yes, Sir Charles."

"Have you wine aboard?"

"I have ordered five cases, sir."

"And tobacco?"

"There is a keg of Trinidad."

"You play a hand at picquet?"

"Passably well, sir."

"Then anchor up, and to sea!"

There was a fresh westerly wind, so by the time the sun was fairly through the morning haze, the ship was hull down from the islands. The decrepit Governor still limpid the deck, with one guiding hand upon the quarter rail.

"You are on Government service now, captain," said he. "They are counting the days till I come to Westminster, I promise you. Have you all that she will carry?"

"Every inch, Sir Charles."

"Keep her so if you blow the sails out of her. I fear, Captain Scarrow, that you will find a blind and broken man a poor companion for your voyage."

"I am honoured in enjoying your Excellency's society," said the captain. "But I am sorry that your eyes should be so afflicted."

"Yes, indeed. It is the cursed glare of the sun on the white streets of Basseterre which has gone far to burn them out."

"I had heard also that you had been plagued by a quartan ague."

"Yes; I have had a pyrexy, which has reduced me much."

"We had set aside a cabin for your surgeon."

"Ah, the rascal! There was no budging him, for he has a snug business amongst the merchants. But hark!" He raised his ring-covered band in the air. From far astern there came the low, deep thunder of cannon.

"It is from the island!" cried the captain in astonishment. "Can it be a signal for us to put back?"

The Governor laughed. "You have heard that Sharkey, the pirate, is to be hanged this morning. I ordered the batteries to salute when the rascal was kicking his last, so that I might know of it out at sea. There's an end of Sharkey!"

"There's an end of Sharkey!" cried the captain; and the crew took up the cry as they gathered in little knots upon the deck and stared back at the low, purple line of the vanishing land.

It was a cheering omen for their start across the Western Ocean, and the invalid Governor found himself a popular man on board, for it was generally understood that but for his insistence upon an immediate trial and sentence, the villain might have played upon some more venal judge and so escaped. At dinner that day Sir Charles gave many anecdotes of the deceased pirate; and so affable was he, and so skilful in adapting his conversation to men of lower

degree, that captain, mate, and Governor smoked their long pipes, and drank their claret as three good comrades should.

"And what figure did Sharkey cut in the dock?" asked the captain.

"He is a man of some presence," said the Governor.

"I had always understood that he was an ugly, sneering devil," remarked the mate.

"Well, I dare say he could look ugly upon occasions," said the Governor.

"I have heard a New Bedford whaleman say that he could not forget his eyes," said Captain Scarrow. "They were of the lightest filmy blue, with red-rimmed lids. Was that not so, Sir Charles?"

"Alas, my own eyes will not permit me to know much of those of others! But I remember now that the adjutant-general said that he had such an eye as you describe, and added that the jury was so foolish as to be visibly discomposed when it was turned upon them. It is well for them that he is dead, for he was a man who would never forget an injury, and if he had laid hands upon any one of them he would have stuffed him with straw and hung him for a figure-head. "

The idea seemed to amuse the Governor, for he broke suddenly into a high, neighing laugh, and the two seamen laughed also, but not so heartily, for they remembered that Sharkey was not the last pirate who sailed the western seas, and that as grotesque a fate might come to be their own. Another bottle was broached to drink to a pleasant voyage, and the Governor would drink just one other on the top of it, so that the seamen were glad at last to stagger off—the one to his watch, and the other to his bunk. But when, after his four hours' spell, the mate came down again, he was amazed to see the Governor, in his Ramillies wig, his glasses, and his powdering-gown, still seated sedately at the lonely table with his reeking pipe and six black bottles by his side.

"I have drunk with the Governor of St. Kitt's when he was sick," said he, "and God forbid that I should ever try to keep pace with him when he is well."

The voyage of the *Morning Star* was a successful one, and in about three weeks she was at the mouth of the British Channel. From the first day the infirm Governor had begun to recover his strength, and before they were halfway across the Atlantic, he was, save only for his eyes, as well as any man upon the ship. Those who uphold the nourishing qualities of wine might point to him in triumph, for never a night passed that he did not repeat the performance of his first one. And yet be would be out upon deck in the early morning as fresh and brisk as the best of them, peering about with his weak eyes, and asking questions about the sails and the rigging, for he was anxious to learn the ways of the sea. And he made up for the deficiency of his eyes by obtaining leave from the captain that the New England seaman— he who had been cast away in the boat— should lead him about, and, above all, that he should sit beside him

when he played cards and count the number of the pips, for unaided he could not tell the king from the knave.

It was natural that this Evanson should do the Governor willing service, since the one was the victim of the vile Sharkey and the other was his avenger. One could see that it was a pleasure to the big American to lend his arm to the invalid, and at night he would stand with all respect behind his chair in the cabin and lay his great stub-nailed forefinger upon the card which he should play. Between them there was little in the pockets either of Captain Scarrow or of Morgan, the first mate, by the time they sighted the Lizard.

And it was not long before they found that all they had heard of the high temper of Sir Charles Ewan fell short of the mark. At a sign of opposition or a word of argument his chin would shoot out from his cravat, his masterful nose would be cocked at a higher and more insolent angle, and his bamboo cane would whistle up over his shoulders. He cracked it once over the head of the carpenter when the man had accidentally jostled him upon the deck. Once, too, when there was some grumbling and talk of a mutiny over the state of the provisions, he was of opinion that they should not wait for the dogs to rise, but that they should march forward and set upon them until they had trounced the devilment out of them. "Give me a knife and a bucket!" he cried with an oath, and could hardly be withheld from setting forth alone to deal with the spokesman of the seamen.

Captain Scarrow had to remind him that though he might be only answerable to himself at St. Kitt's, killing became murder upon the high seas. In politics he was, as became his official position, a stout prop of the House of Hanover, and he swore in his cups that he had never met a Jacobite without pistolling him where he stood. Yet for all his vapouring and his violence he was so good a companion, with such a stream of strange anecdote and reminiscence, that Scarrow and Morgan had never known a voyage pass so pleasantly.

And then at length came the last day, when, after passing the island, they had struck land again at the high white cliffs at Beachy Head. As evening fell the ship lay rolling in an oily calm, a league off from Winchelsea, with the long, dark snout of Dungeness jutting out in front of her. Next morning they would pick up their pilot at the Foreland, and Sir Charles might meet the King's ministers at Westminster before the evening. The boatswain had the watch, and the three friends were met for a last turn of cards in the cabin, the faithful American still serving as eyes to the Governor. There was a good stake upon the table, for the sailors had tried on this last night to win their losses back from their passenger. Suddenly he threw his cards down, and swept all the money into the pocket of his long-flapped silken waistcoat.

"The game's mine!" said he.

"Heh, Sir Charles, not so fast!" cried Captain Scarrow; "you have not played out the hand, and we are not the losers."

"Sink you for a liar!" said the Governor. "I tell you I *have* played out the hand, and that you *are* a loser." He whipped off his wig and his glasses as he spoke, and there was a high, bald forehead, and a pair of shifty blue eyes with the red rims of a bull terrier.

"Good God!" cried the mate. "It's Sharkey!"

The two sailors sprang from their seats, but the big American castaway had put his huge back against the cabin door, and he held a pistol in each of his hands. The passenger had also laid a pistol upon the scattered cards in front of him, and he burst into his high, neighing laugh. "Captain Sharkey is the name, gentlemen," said he, "and this is Roaring Ned Galloway, the quartermaster of the *Happy Delivery*. We made it hot, and so they marooned us: me on a dry Tortuga cay, and him in an oarless boat. You dogs— you poor, fond, water-hearted dogs— we hold you at the end of our pistols!"

"You may shoot, or you may not!" cried Scarrow, striking his hand upon the breast of his frieze jacket. "If it's my last breath, Sharkey, I tell you that you are a bloody rogue and miscreant, with a halter and hell-fire in store for you!"

"There's a man of spirit, and one of my own kidney, and he's going to make a very pretty death of it!" cried Sharkey. "There's no one aft save the man at the wheel, so you may keep your breath, for you'll need it soon. Is the dinghy astern, Ned?"

"Ay, ay, captain!"

"And the other boats scuttled?"

"I bored them all in three places. "

"Then we shall have to leave you, Captain Scarrow. You look as if you hadn't quite got your bearings yet. Is there anything you'd like to ask me?"

"I believe you're the devil himself!" cried the captain. "Where is the Governor of St. Kitt's?"

"When last I saw him his Excellency was in bed with his throat cut. When I broke prison I learnt from my friends— for Captain Sharkey has those who love him in every port— that the Governor was starting for Europe under a master who had never seen him. I climbed his verandah, and I paid him the little debt that I owed him. Then I came aboard you with such of his things as I had need of, and a pair of glasses to hide these tell-tale eyes of mine, and I have ruffled it as a governor should. Now, Ned, you can get to work upon them. "

"Help! help! Watch ahoy!" yelled the mate;but the butt of the pirate's pistol crashed down on his head, and he dropped like a pithed ox. Scarrow rushed for the door, but the sentinel clapped his hand over his mouth, and threw his other arm round his waist.

"No use, Master Scarrow," said Sharkey. "Let us see you go down on your knees and beg for your life. "

"I'll see you—" cried Scarrow, shaking his mouth clear.

"Twist his arm round, Ned. Now will you?"

"No; not if you twist it off. "

"Put an inch of your knife into him."

"You may put six inches, and then I won't. "

"Sink me, but I like his spirit!" cried Sharkey. "Put your knife in your pocket, Ned. You've saved your skin, Scarrow, and it's a pity so stout a man should not take to the only trade where a pretty fellow can pick up a living. You must be born for no common death, Scarrow, since you have lain at my mercy and lived to tell the story. Tie him up, Ned."

"To the stove, captain?"

"Tut, tut! there's a fire in the stove. None of your rover tricks, Ned Galloway, unless they are called for, or I'll let you know which of us two is captain and which is quartermaster. Make him fast to the table. "

"Nay, I thought you meant to roast him!" said the quartermaster. "You surely do not mean to let him go?"

"If you and I were marooned on a Bahama cay, Ned Galloway, it is still for me to command and for you to obey. Sink you for a villain, do you dare to question my orders?"

"Nay, nay, Captain Sharkey, not so hot, sir!" said the quartermaster, and, lifting Scarrow like a child, he laid him on the table. With the quick dexterity of a seaman, he tied his spread-eagled hands and feet with a rope which was passed underneath, and gagged him securely with the long cravat which used to adorn the chin of the Governor of St. Kitt's.

"Now, Captain Scarrow, we must take our leave of you," said the pirate. "If I had half a dozen of my brisk boys at my heels I should have had your cargo and your ship, but Roaring Ned could not find a foremast hand with the spirit of a mouse. I see there are some small craft about, and we shall get one of them. When Captain Sharkey has a boat he can get a smack, when he has a smack he can get a brig, when he has a brig he can get a barque, and when he has a barque he'll soon have a full-rigged ship of his own— so make haste into London town, or I may be coming back, after all, for the *Morning Star*. "

Captain Scarrow heard the key turn in the lock as they left the cabin. Then, as he strained at his bonds, he heard their footsteps pass up the companion and along the quarter-deck to where the dinghy hung in the stern. Then, still struggling and writhing, he heard the creak of the falls and the splash of the boat in the water. In a mad fury he tore and dragged at his ropes, until at last, with flayed wrists and ankles, he rolled from the table, sprang over the dead

mate, kicked his way through the closed door, and rushed hatless on to the deck.

"Ahoy! Peterson, Armitage,Wilson!" he screamed. "Cutlasses and pistols! Clear away the long-boat! Clear away the gig! Sharkey, the pirate, is in yonder dinghy. Whistle up the larboard watch, bo'sun, and tumble into the boats, all hands. "

Down splashed the long-boat and down splashed the gig, but in an instant the coxswains and crews were swarming up the falls on to the deck once more.

"The boats are scuttled!" they cried. "They are leaking like a sieve. "

The captain gave a bitter curse. He had been beaten and outwitted at every point. Above was a cloudless, starlit sky, with neither wind nor the promise of it. The sails flapped idly in the moonlight. Far away lay a fishing-smack, with the men clustering over their net. Close to them was the little dinghy, dipping and lifting over the shining swell.

"They are dead men!" cried the captain. "A shout all together, boys, to warn them of their danger." But it was too late. At that very moment the dinghy shot into the shadow of the fishing-boat. There were two rapid pistol-shots, a scream, and then another pistol-shot, followed by silence. The clustering fishermen had disappeared. And then, suddenly, as the first puffs of a land-breeze came out from the Sussex shore, the boom swung out, the mainsail filled, and the little craft crept out with her nose to the Atlantic.

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16: The Wood Devil Thing

Gordon MacCreagh

1889-1953

People's, Jan 1916

SERGEANT McGRATH, "Moro" McGrath, as he was called, of the Burma police, squatted chunkily on the ground cloth of a green waterproof E.P. tent and regarded with thin-lipped cynicism the uppermost of a sheaf of printed notices which the *dak* runner had just brought in.

Fresh from the government press, they announced, in English on one half and neat, round Burmese on the other, that five thousand rupees were offered for the capture, dead or alive, of one Boh Lu-Bain, convicted of dacoity, with murder, robbery under arms, arson, and an appalling list of subsidiary crimes.

The windproof acetylene camp lantern threw sharp, angular shadows across the hard-grain mahogany of the sergeant's face as it suddenly cracked into a grim smile.

"Huh! Looks like a pretty durn safe offer— seein' things is as they is," he grunted to himself aloud, after the manner of white men who spend much time in the far corners of the earth, with only natives to talk to. "Mister Boh is some slick conundrum."

His lips pressed slowly together again, and he caressed his wooden block of a chin in perplexed introspection. As he turned the case over in his mind and swore impatiently at the queerness of its attendant circumstances, another link was suddenly added to the chain of uncanniness. From out of the dense, black jungles that ringed the clearing there sounded a wild, quavering cry, so long-drawn and so pitiful that the subdued clamor from the other tents of the little camp stopped short as though cut off with a knife.

Before the long wail had ceased to vibrate through the still, hot air, in some miraculous manner a rifle had appeared in Sergeant McGrath's hands and he stood outside of his tent, stepping with instinctive caution away from the thin shaft of light which cut far out across the blackness from the tent flap. He listened in the intense silence which had fallen. Then—

"Hussein Jemadar!" he called.

"Huzoor!"

A tall, uniformed figure appeared out of the darkness and saluted.

"Take two men and see what that cry was about."

The jemadar saluted again and disappeared; and McGrath stood peering like a nighthawk into the blacker shadows across the clearing. Presently an altercation was apparent among the men's tents. It waxed fiercer; and shortly the jemadar loomed up again.

"Huzoor, the men are mutinous. They insist that it is the Nat devil who shrieks as he rends some unfortunate, and their knees are limp with fear."

"Fathers of many fools!" barked the sergeant. "This is no time to make monkey-chatter. There is need of speed. I'll attend to the men later— when I come back. Make lights and double the sentry. Swift, now!"

For an instant he was a darker blot under the shadow of the trees, and then he merged into the blackness. The native jemadar had to marvel for the hundredth time at the speed and silence with which his superior melted into the undergrowth; and then he went to carry out his order and to acquaint the men who were afraid of nats of the greater hell which would presently occur to them when the sahib returned.

The sergeant glided swiftly on in the direction from which the cry had come; but, for all his unhesitating promptness, the chills kept racing up and down his spine. There was something mysterious about this case, something not altogether wholesome— to say nothing of plunging at night, and alone, into an inky tropical jungle where soft scufflings and padded footfalls sounded disquietingly from behind the tree trunks, how far or how close to be judged by ear alone. But if there had been light enough to distinguish details by, the sergeant's face would have shown the same alertness and relentless ferocity as the other night prowlers as he slipped in and out with hardly any more noise than they, and with all his muscles tensed to jump like a cat in any direction at any moment.

Presently he became aware of a gentle crackling of twigs before him. Instantly he pressed himself against a tree, motionless as the trunk itself, straining his eyes into the gloom, while pictures of all the things that might drop on him from above raced through his mind. The bushes swished again, and a dim shape crept out not twenty yards distant and crouched, a shadow among the shadows. Most men would have yelled and fired point-blank at the shape; but Moro McGrath never stirred, only his fingers tightened slowly over the stock of his rifle which hung easily at arm's length. He had graduated from that most efficient training school, the Philippines. Seven strenuous years had he put in as an independent scout before the high tides of his turbulent soul had drifted him just round the corner into Burma; and he rested secure in the knowledge that he could shoot from the shoulder or the hip or in midair with the speed of an electric spark.

The crouching shadow swayed up on all fours and came uncertainly forward; then it sank behind another bush, only ten yards away this time. The muzzle of the sergeant's rifle, still at arm's length, swung slowly and noiselessly round, and the thick forefinger curled round the trigger, just a fraction of an ounce below the necessary firing pull.

Then the thing groaned.

"God! An' I near drilled him!" exploded the sergeant. He sprang forward, all thoughts of things that might drop or jump out from behind trees banished from his mind, and lifted the broken thing in his arms. It only moaned.

"Pret-ty durn bad hit," he muttered. "Got some kind of a gun, too. Feels like—Curse this darkness!" He fumbled a while with the inert arms and legs, and then presently swung them easily over one wide shoulder and strode swiftly to the camp.

The clearing was a blaze of lights, and the sentry had contrived to collect three other supports round himself in the event of an attack by the expected nat. The jemadar and others came running. McGrath handed over his burden.

"Our uniform— what's left of it. Who's the man? Bring a light."

A man ran up with a petrol flare.

"Allah, have mercy!" burst from the jemadar. "The man has no face!"

The light flickered ghastly on a clotted smudge where the face should have been. Livid strips of twisted flesh were all that remained. Moro McGrath had seen what was left after the terrible sideswipe that a bear may sometimes deliver; but this thing was just a horrid crimson mess. It was as if some malignant giant hand had deliberately blotted out all chance of recognition. The sergeant drew in his breath with a whistling sound.

"Take him to the doctor, babu, quick! An'— here, take also this remnant of a rifle. Prepare report. I follow."

He went to his own tent to wash up, for he was one of those men who somehow contrived to look neat and trim under the most impossible circumstances— a remnant of his soldier training. As he cleaned up, his eye fell again on the reward notices. The cynical look came back, tinged this time with something of awe.

"Five thou is a heap o' money; but— personal I don't want it bad enough to go scoutin' up that valley. Can't altogether blame my fellers for talkin' nat. Wonder what in thunder could 'a' done that to that poor devil." Thank Pete it's Brandon's district—" He broke off and listened again, with his head cocked alert like a lynx. From out the jungle came another rending of undergrowth, heavy-footed and ponderous this time. The sergeant slipped out of the tent and once more became a motionless shadow at another point in the clearing. The crackling came nearer.

"Man!" muttered McGrath. "A big un. White, an' a city feller, I'll bet."

A tremendous figure broke out of the bushes not four feet from him, and plunged on past him, all unconscious. The man made straight for the lighted tent, and the watcher glided after him like a ghost. The big visitor strode into the shaft of light from the tent flap, and then wheeled like a bull gaur as the sergeant's voice broke on him from right at his heels:

"Durned if it ain't Dickie Travers! How'd you blow up here? Fired from the laboratory job in Rangoon?"

"Moro, old scout! Say, I'm dashed glad to see you! They told me back at the village that I'd find your camp on the Kindat Road. Tried to scare me at the same time by swearing that the woods here were full of devils, all red-hot and howling. But say, I want to see you awful bad; you're the only man in Burma who can help me out, and I had to risk the devils." The big man laughed and stretched his great shoulders.

"An', since you think you can lick your weight in devils any day, you jest came along, hey?" the sergeant grinned quizzically. "Well, there's more in heaven an' earth, son, an' particularly in the almighty jungle, than is dreamed of in Rangoon city. C'm' on in an' moisten up an' unload your chest."

The younger man needed no more urging to break into a long and enthusiastic harangue, the coherence of which was considerably marred by continuous and unnecessary digressions devoted to glowing descriptions of a certain third party. The sergeant chewed on a pipe and grinned tolerantly at his friend's ardor, though, as the story progressed, his dark face took on an expression of concern. Finally he rose very deliberately and knocked out his pipe, carefully dropping the ash into an empty tobacco tin.

"Well," he announced, with conviction, "if you think the girl's worth this damfool scheme of yours, you got it good an' proper; worse'n I ever gave you discredit for. Now lemme tell you somep'n about this Boh man. Listen careful, now.

"This Lu-Bain chief is the hardest proposition in dacoits since the famous Boh Da-Thone. An' he's no ignorant savage, lemme tell you. He's a Pali scholar an' a graduate of Rangoon College. Also he's a high-class gun artist, an' incidental the ugliest brute in Burma. Got a face like a gorilla; an' his actions are just about as inhuman."

"I don't care," persisted Travers doggedly, setting his lips with grim determination. "I've got to get that money."

Moro McGrath spun round on him from his short walk up and down the tent and shot out a sinewy forefinger at him.

"Wait a minute, son! Don't be so malice an' prepense against the man. The parade ain't commenced yet. Listen! This Boh party accrued a considerable gang an' waltzed around the country in the usual way, destroyin' the populace most prodigal, an'— Well, we had to get after him with two or three detachments, an' we hived most o' the bunch— there's some eighteen or twenty heads stuck up in the Taungyen market place for identification right now— but this Boh ideal is a slick number, an' he gets away clear. I chase him an' one or two other hard citizens into this valley of Hankow, which is the thickest, stinkiest, malariest

jungle in all Chindwin, an' which, thank Pete, is out o' my district; an' here he lays up, bottled.

"So far, fine an' dandy, thank you. But now listen, son, careful. The Burmans an' my fool Punjabi constables say it's plumb impossible for any human bein' to live in that jungle 'count o' fever an' snakes an' beasts an' hell all else. Wherefore, with pucca native reasonin' most circumstantial an' proper, they prove that he's changed himself by means o' magic into a highclass wood demon, or not, all teeth an' claws an' smoke."

"Hold on!" interrupted Tracy eagerly. "How d'you know he's bottled? What proof have you that he's not gone out of the valley?"

"Proof an' to spare. Every now an' then some jungle man comes in scared stiff an' reports how he seen the famous yellow silk gaungbaung headdress an' the rifle with the solid-silver stock; an' once in a while friend Boh sends along a little proof, extra an' unsolicited, jest to show he's happy an' keepin' his end up. F'r instance, a jungle man comes in the other day with his hands tied behind him an' his ears hung around his neck on a string, an' he throws up a yarn about devils howlin' an' dancin' in the dark that'd paralyze you. An' not long after, a raft floats down the river with one o' my own men, crucified an' generally used up somethin' horrible." The sergeant grimaced and shuddered at the recollection. Then he continued with deliberate conviction: "Now all that's plain dacoit humor, an' don't raise my belief in devils any; but— Now, mark me, I maintains right here that the Boh's gone crazy with the heat or the hardship or the loneliness or somep'n; but the rest o' the story ain't normal; there's somep'n I can't figure out, somep'n outside human range. Listen:

"More recently these outbursts of enthusiasm has taken on a— a kinder unwholesome nature. Two jungle men come in in a canoe with a body whose arm is wrenched complete off. Torn, mind you, not hacked. Then comes another, crushed jest to pulp; every bone broken, like he'd fallen out a flyin' machine. The Burmans say right away it's a nat; the strength required to do those stunts ain't human. An', by God, it ain't!"

Sergeant McGrath paused and looked darkly up through his eyebrows at his friend. Travers was visibly affected by the uncanny recital; his usual attitude of careless confidence had left him, but the determination showed relentlessly in his face.

"It's weird, Moro, old scout, and maybe dangerous; but you don't head me off yet," he maintained seriously. "I'm out after that reward, and I'm going to get it."

"Hm!" grunted the older man. "Sudden death or sudden matrimony; you lose either way. Well, there's another chapter been added to the story just before you come in. Maybe we can get some information at firsthand— if the poor devil can talk. C'm' on to the hospital tent."

The fussy little native doctor explained with much circumstance in the exaggerated whisper of his kind that his skill had so far revived the man that he was able to talk and anxious to make his report.

"Have you found out who it is?" asked McGrath in a responsive whisper, unconsciously affected by the technical jargon and calculated impressiveness of the "profession."

A mass of bandages heaved itself up onto an elbow on the cot and saluted.

"It is Misri-Khan, *sahib*, nambar sebentin," mumbled a muffled voice from out the wrappings, and then proceeded, weakly and with many relapses, to unfold an amazing story, the gist of which was: First, that he, Misri-Khan, was a brave man, and, therefore, ignoring the devil stories, had scouted up that dim valley where all others feared to go, looking for tracks of the Boh. Secondly, that the total absence of tracks convinced him that the Boh had indeed become a Nat— for Nats, of course, traveled over the ground without leaving trace. Nevertheless, did he continue on the trail for the honor of the service, and would the protector of the poor see that he received suitable reward therefore? And finally: "On the second day, sahib, as I sought in the darkest part of the forest among great trees of Padouk and Sal many cubits high, it happened that I heard a great rending of wood, and— Allah is my witness, sahib— lifting my eyes, I beheld the father of all the Nats tear a great tree asunder and spring at me from the bowels thereof. The face was the face of the Boh, only more terrible, but the arms were of the thickness of a man's leg, and hairy as those of a spider. Huzoor, I have distinguished service medal; but at that sight my knees were turned to water, and I fell upon the ground; yet did I remember to fire my carbine. I am also secondclass marksman, sahib, and at that distance could I assuredly not miss. Yet the ball went through the devil, and he leaped upon me, howling magic words which I knew not. That is all, sahib. He left me for dead; yet by the favor of Allah did I recover and crawl with much tribulation to the jungle's edge, where the sahib, may Allah reward him, found me. There is yet one more thing, sahib. The Nat, having smitten me, took my carbine and bent the barrel as a bow is bent. In witness whereof the gun is now in the hands of the jemadar. Bus, I have finished."

McGrath asked a few more questions, gave some directions for the man's comfort, and then, with significant and pointed silence, took his friend by the arm and led him out to examine the rifle. It was as the man had said. The steel barrel was bent into an arc. McGrath took it to the light and examined it with critical, narrowed eyes. The puzzled expression on his face increased to dark amazement.

"Now that's durn queer," he muttered. "I figured it might possibly have been hammered that way, or even bitten by some powerful animal; but lookut here, Dick, there's not a mark; the bluein' ain't got a scratch on it. An' a durn queer

story; of course padded out a whole heap with the good old Oriental fairy stuff; but there's somep'n mighty unhealthy in this whole business, Dick, my son. D'ja still feel all het up to go Boh devil huntin'?"

The determined lines on Travers' face assumed an expression of dogged obstinacy.

"Queer it is, Moro," he admitted grudgingly. "But this bogy talk is all hot air. Anyhow, if it was the devil himself, I'm not going to back out now. I've got to get that reward, and in a hurry, 'cause if I don't, her old dad's sending her home to God's country next month. But look here, Moro, old scout, you don't stand to gain anything out of this; you don't have to come. In fact, I'd hate to drag you into it; I can get a guide and go alone."

McGrath looked sourly up at him from under one raised eyebrow.

"You're in love," he snorted, "so I ain't takin' offense at anything you say. Sure I don't have to come. I ain't gettin' married; so I don't have to figure on a violent death as a cheerful alternative. But I know you when you look that way, an' if you're so durned desperate as all that, someone's got to take care of you. 'Tain't my district, an' I ain't hankerin' to prospect that valley, but— well, I got a feelin' that I'm the goat."

Travers shot forth a great paw and gripped his friend's hand with an enthusiasm which amounted almost to adoration in his frank, open eyes. The sergeant extricated himself hastily and hid his confusion under a gruff growl of:

"Aw, I need a holiday, anyway; an' I got a new gun to try out. 'Sides, don't you talk to me about a guide. You can't get any man to take you into that valley; an' I can't send any o' my fool Punjabis; they'd be worse'n useless. There's only one man I know who's got the guts, an' that's Moung Tha— Dun, an old Burman hunter; an' he won't go without me, you can lay to that. So it's got to be jest We, Us, and Company."

Moro McGrath was a man who knew men. His diagnosis of the morale of his police constables was unerring. His natural impulse was to drive them, as he well knew how; but he reflected that he could not very well force them to accompany him on a private venture outside of his district. He was also peculiarly accurate in his estimate of Tha-Dun. The old tracker never hesitated. He came with direful warnings, it is true, and much misgiving; but his confidence in McGrath's experience and resourcefulness was infinite.

So it was that only three men stood the following evening shoulder deep in a patch of kaing grass at the lower end of the forbiddinglooking valley. They looked microscopically insignificant in their giant surroundings. High overhead was a mat of huge, interlaced branches through which the discouraged sunlight filtered with difficulty. Below a dense tangle of undergrowth out of which giant trunks shot sixty feet clear from the moist earth and gleamed ghostly pale in the perpetual twilight.

McGrath surveyed the gloomy surroundings with deep disapproval.

"Travers, my boy," he growled, "we've got one helluva job in front of us. It's goin' to take days to crawl through this, huntin' for a trail. If we find one, an' spot the Boh an' his fellers first, well an' good. If Mr. Boh spots us first— well, he can handle that silver-plated gun of his like an expert. Meanwhiles, no noise, no campfires, no dry clothes, an' no fresh grub. I'm goin' to have some holiday. Whosit says, 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread'?"

"Meaning how?" demanded Travers.

"Well, we're havin' all this picnic so you can commit matrimonial hara-kiri; an' I've read somewheres that in heaven they neither marry nor are given in marriage. I infers that angels fear to tread."

"And that I'm a fool," laughed Travers, with a perfect understanding of the deep strength and determination that lay beneath his friend's misogynistic grumbling. "You're a cold-blooded beast, Moro, and a wicked cynic; but you're a crafty hunter all the same, and I guess you're right about cutting out all betraying fires and being mighty cautious. Today's march wasn't so bad, but I suppose the real campaign begins tomorrow."

"No, sir!" the other dissented immediately. "It begins right here, tonight. This is Hankow Valley, son, an' we don't take no chances on Mister Boh bein' away visitin' friend Nat this evening."

Tracy, with the omniscience of youth, was rather inclined to be impatient at the old campaigner's caution; but he was reminded of the reality of their nearness to danger with startling unpleasantness. With the setting of the sun every insect sound hushed— birds there were none in that somber tangle of trees. It was just that period of brooding mystery which falls in the tropic twilight between the sleeping of the day creatures and the waking of the beings of the night, when the period of real silence brings a surprised realization of the undercurrent of sound which has all the time been constituting the voice of the jungle. As the little party gathered wearily round their cold, cheerless meal, the eerie silence was suddenly broken by a weird, wild, whooping noise far up the valley, beginning with a low wail and ending up in a staccato, coughing shriek.

Moung Tha-Dun fell on his face and began muttering invocations to his guardian spirits.

"Ahai!" he moaned. "The Nat! It is the Nat who calls Thakins; let us depart from this evil place."

Even the white men were affected. The chill dusk, the gloomy valley, and that uncanny sound, all combined with the fantastic stories which they had been hearing to build up a creepy sensation of unwholesome mystery.

"What is it, Moro?" whispered Travers, with blanched face and wide, staring eyes.

"Damned if I know," replied the other uneasily. "It sounds kinder vaguely familiar, but I can't place it. Gee, I got chills crawlin' all up an' down my back. Wish we dared risk a fire. Guess we'd better watch two at a time tonight."

But the night passed without mishap, though once again, before darkness closed down on them, the fearsome sound rose and swelled in the distance. However, with the daylight came renewed confidence and a feeling of self-conscious humiliation at their nervousness of the night before. They discussed their plan of campaign eagerly, and arranged to work carefully up the valley, abreast of each other, and search for tracks; they were to separate so as to cover as much ground as possible, but should always remain within calling distance, in the event of anyone being pounced upon by some unknown thing. However, even with the satisfying knowledge of the proximity of friends, it was no drawing-room party. The undergrowth was appallingly thick and thorny, and progress was black, as well as heartbreakingly slow. Tha-Dun's attitude, with his imminent fear of the supernatural, was positively heroic, and what lent weight to his gloomy theories and forebodings was the fact that for five whole days never a track was found, though regularly as the darkness closed in that ghastly cry filled the air.

"It gets me," swore McGrath. "Not a durned scratch of trail of a single live thing. Even the animals have been scared out. That poor devil of a constable without a face spoke truer'n we ever gave him credit for. There's been no rain for two weeks, an' if there was any living thing in this unholy place we'd have found tracks by now."

Moung Tha-Dun dismally assured him that this was but to be expected, for Nats left no footprints, and the only reason they had escaped so long was that it was waiting for a favorable combination of the stars to spring upon them and rend them.

But that day at last brought to light a trail which seemed only to lend weight to the Burman's forebodings. McGrath, who was working up the center of the valley, gave the mewing otter call which had been agreed upon as a signal, and brought the others hastening to his side. They found him with set lips, and the corrugations of his hard forehead crowded together in disquieting thought, bending over a skeleton.

"Look at that!" he directed their attention in a low voice. "His ribs have been crushed in like eggshells. See, in two wide bands. Jes' 's if some giant had taken an' hugged him."

"Giant is right," agreed Travers, with a feeling of awe. "No human being could have done it. What do you think it can be?"

"Durned if I know," speculated McGrath, searching back in his mind for some parallel. "A big snake might do it, but then a snake that could do that would easily have swallowed him."

Both voices had unconsciously fallen to whispers as they stood in the presence of this mystery, and they cast uneasy glances over their shoulders, half-expecting to see some fantastic monster creeping on them.

Moung Tha-Dun had meanwhile been searching the surrounding bush. "Thakin," he called tremulously. "Of a surety the Nat has done this thing, for yonder lies his gun, and no man would have left such a prize behind. Moreover," he added impressively, "the Thakin knows that poor jungle people have no guns."

"Well, what of it?" queried McGrath, not catching the drift of his meaning.

"None but a follower of the Boh would carry such a gun, Thakin."

"God! I never thought of that. The Boh sure wouldn't go killing his own people; an', if it ain't him, then who's doin' all this mysterious murder?"

"The Nat!" insisted Tha-Dun darkly.

"Nat be hanged!" growled McGrath. "Anyhow, it's durned funny, whatever it is. Looks to me that it'd be healthier not to separate so promiscuous. It'll take longer to cover the ground, but it'll be a heap more comfortable to my spine."

As they began to approach the region from which the nightly howlings proceeded, they were able to distinguish the fearsome sound more clearly. "Whoo-oo Wha-aa Aa-ee-ee!" it would rise, with blood-chilling shrillness, trailing off into a high-pitched chuckle which had not been audible before. But familiarity, in this case, surely bred no contempt. Each time that the sound burst with startling suddenness upon the dank evening air the three would instinctively shrink together, and then look at one another shamefacedly.

"Damn it all!" exploded McGrath in exasperation. "It ain't the infernal noise that gets us; we've all heard worse before. It's the time an' the place an' the bogy stories mixed in with it that makes us jump. We got to steady up our nerves for when we do come across the thing."

"Tell you what," interposed Travers, "it seems that the Thing— I don't know what else to call it— comes out only in the evening; if that's so, we have nothing to fear as long as daylight lasts, such as it is in this dismal hole in the ground."

The others immediately agreed with him, and the party accordingly proceeded with more confidence. All thought of danger at the hands of the Boh had left them. The total absence of tracks convinced them that any human beings who might have been in the valley had long since left it or were dead. But their assurance received a rude setback, and the whole mystery was forced into startling prominence a day later, when they came upon unmistakable tracks— human tracks.

Moung Tha-Dun, whose foreboding terror vanished at the sight of something that he could understand, was down on all fours in an instant, questing, nosing like a hound. He led them some little distance, cunningly examining the ground and the bushes on either side before he spoke.

"Thakin," he whispered, "the trail is that of a man running, fleeing from some great fear, for he has run blindly, cutting his feet on the stones. Yet—there are no footsteps that follow."

Moro McGrath, who was no mean tracker himself, had observed the same phenomenon.

"Funny! Damn queer!" he kept repeating in staccato barks. "What the devil did he run from? Go ahead, Tha-Dun. Better load with buckshot, Travers; your Paradox at close quarters is better than a rifle."

The trail led disappointingly to rocky ground, where it was speedily lost; but Moung Tha-Dun, who was in the lead, presently uttered an exclamation of delight and darted forward. He returned with a beaming face.

"Behold what I have found, Thakin!" he jubilated. In his hand he held a long strip of yellow silk.

"Well, what's there to be so blamed happy about?" demanded McGrath impatiently, even his drawn, wire nerves all of a jangle with this dark enigma. "The gink has dropped his headdress in the scare, that's all."

"The Boh's *gaungbaung*, Thakin, was of yellow silk," grinned the other. "And if it be the Boh who fled, why, then, he is assuredly not become a Nat, and I have nothing further to fear."

Travers groaned. "Is that all? Damn it, that only deepens the mystery. What the deuce did he run from? The Boh wasn't a man to be easily frightened from what you all tell me. Then what was this awful thing that scared him so?"

McGrath leaned, frowning, on his rifle for many minutes before he spoke, as was his habit when thinking. "Boys," he stated at length, "I ain't beginnin' to guess what kind of a banshee this is, but one thing's clear. We ain't counted on the Boh any of late; an' if these tracks is his, we got to watch out for him as well as for the Thing. All we can do is be durned leery; an' I've a notion we're bound to find out somep'n soon; we're right in the middle of things here."

He was right, though he was far from guessing the horrible way in which enlightenment was to come.

That night as they sat in their camp, waiting with a sort of fearful fascination for the familiar sound, a terrible cry rose on the night air. A human cry of deadly terror.

"Amma-lé!" it shrieked. "Spare me! Let me go! Let—" The words were cut short by a scream of anguish. In the appalling stillness that followed the three thought they could distinguish the low, fiendish chuckle which usually terminated those awe-inspiring howlings. They sprang to their feet with blanched faces, snatching up their rifles as they did so. For a long time they stood motionless, peering apprehensively into the dark.

"It's no use, boys," said McGrath shakily at last. "We can't do a thing in the dark. We'll jest have to sit right here. An' I don't care what happens; we're goin' to have a fire tonight."

"I'm with you!" agreed Travers emphatically. "A damn big fire!"

None of the three slept a wink the whole of that interminable night, and with the first breath of dawn they started out to discover that grim tragedy of the dark. It did not take long. Signs were plentiful enough. They soon came upon the ashes of a campfire under a great tree. Alongside lay the body of a man, gaunt and emaciated with starvation. But it was not the pinched frame with the bones almost protruding through the skin, nor the expression of awful terror stamped on the brutal gorilloid face that made the white men turn aside with sudden nausea. Neither hunger nor fear had killed the man. He lay on his back in a welter of blood with half his chest torn completely out. From beneath his body protruded the butt end of a rifle, gleaming silver through the clotted red. Even Moung Tha-Dun was affected. Death was nothing to him, and he had looked on worse mutilations before, the work of dacoits; but the horror of the superhuman force that had been brought into play gripped his soul. He shook it off, however, as instinctive habit began to assert itself, and he commenced to search for tracks. Carefully he went over the ground, examining every blade, every leaf. At last: "Thakin," he whispered, "here also there are no tracks!"

"Damn it, man, there must be!" cried McGrath. "This thing ain't a ghost. It can't vanish into smoke. If it's material enough to tear a man in half, it must leave solid tracks somewhere." Suddenly an idea struck him. "Travers," he barked, "d'you remember exactly how that other fellow lay?"

"Yes, he lay on his back, too. Why?"

"Hell, no, I don't mean that! He lay under jest such a low-spreading tree, didn't he?"

"By George, that's so! I never thought of that. You mean that the Thing swoops down from a tree?"

"Pree-cisely. An' I'm goin' to see." With the prospect of immediate action and probable danger the fierce leopard light glowed again in his eyes. "Now you watch out good an' careful above. I got to rely entirely on your shooting."

Without further hesitation he scrambled up the trunk into whatever the leaves might hide, and began working his way along a great overhanging bough which passed over the body some seven feet above. Travers waited apprehensively.

"Here it is!" suddenly came the excited voice from above. "Here's a smear of blood— an' here's another! An' here's— well, I'll be damned!" He was directly above the body now. His voice dropped. "Here's the bark rubbed off in two wide bands!"

He swung clear and dropped lightly to the ground. "Now what d'you think o' that?" he demanded.

"It's evident that the Thing comes from a tree," answered Travers in a frightened whisper. "But what are those two wide bands always? The coils of a snake?"

"A big snake gripping the branch for a stroke might leave jest such a mark; but— there ain't no snake in the world could do that awful thing. I'm beginnin' to have a idea, son. That there noise is strikin' back kinder familiar. 'Jest the beginnin's of a idea. But it's too horrible; too durned fantastic; I gotta see more before I can tell you. But there's one thing clear. We got to keep away from overhanging branches— an' we can build all the fires we want. The Boh, poor devil, has squared up with the bank. There ain't nothin' owin'. Travers, my son, we'll camp right here; an' I'll guarantee the big show for this very night."

He selected a place nearby, free from low trees, and the day was spent under his direction in clearing away the surrounding scrub to guard against surprise and leave plenty of room for action. Then, as dusk drew on, they built a roaring fire over the unfortunate Boh's camp, and, at his further suggestion, retired to their clearing to wait.

"D'ja get me?" chuckled the cunning hunter. "That'll bring the Thing into the light, while we remain hid."

They were still discussing possibilities and plans when Moung Tha-Dun raised his hand with a warning gesture. His quick ear had detected the approaching sound of swishing leaves. They lay silent, while the disturbance came nearer. From the snapping of twigs and the soft thuds among the high branches it was evident that some large body was making its way toward them. Finally it could be heard in the upper branches of the lit-up tree. The three watchers were keyed up to an intolerable pitch of half-apprehensive excitement. What would the next few seconds disclose? Their overstrung imaginations conjured up all sorts of ghostly forms. But some fiendish, intuition seemed to make the Thing suspicious. It made querulous noises and shuffled about behind the screen of leaves above in evident hesitation about descending.

Suddenly McGrath reached for Travers' gun and glided off into the darkness without a word. Even through his excitement the latter could not help admiring the snakelike skill of his friend. The situation now became intense. The unknown horror in the treetop, and McGrath swallowed up in the silent dark! Travers had to keep a grip on himself to prevent himself from shouting aloud. Suddenly the Thing moved again. It shifted its position. Travers heard the quick click of a lifted hammer, followed by a flash and a report. There came a short, coughing roar, and a vast shape hurled itself full twenty feet to the next tree, and went crashing off into the darkness.

McGrath rushed up, falling over his words. "Did you see it? What was it like? What the hell have you got in this gun?" All in one breath.

"My God!" stammered Travers. "It looked like— like a devil."

Moung Tha-Dun was on his face. "*Amma-lé*!" he wailed. "The Nat! It is a Nat, indeed!"

Meanwhile, McGrath had snapped open the breech and torn out the empty shell. "Oh, fool! Fool that I am!" he groaned. "To take up a gun without looking at the load! Man, you've got No. 4, an' I told you buckshot! Course I only tickled him. Here, gimme my rifle, an' load up this toy with somep'n solid! Tha-Dun, father of an idiot, quit your howlin' an' get up an' hustle! We got to build a whole circle of fires now. It'll sure come back; an' there ain't no use in tryin' to hide now!"

They threw themselves fiercely into the work, collecting up all the brush which they had cut during the day, and frantically chopping more, halting every minute to listen for the malignant Thing's approach. Progress was cruelly slow.

"Moro," panted Travers, "we'll never do it; and don't forget we've got to keep our fires going. I guess if we make two more big blazes in a triangle they'll light up all lines of approach."

"Guess you're right, son," grunted McGrath. "Take one each. Tha-Dun, you pile s'm' more stuff on the first!"

They had barely got their defenses lit, when a swoop and a crash in the trees announced the creature's return.

"D'ja get that?" snapped McGrath. "It comes from another direction. It can think!"

It almost seemed that he was right. With devilish cunning the Thing kept out of range of the firelight, coughing and whooping with rage as it circled round behind the high screen of leaves looking for an opening, while the three men slowly pivoted with it.

For an hour this deadly game continued.

One of the fires began to burn low. A malignant ill fortune seemed to direct that it should be just the most difficult one to tend. At this point the rushing stream cut a swath between deep clay banks, and the giant trees hung lower over the water than anywhere else. The men watched the sinking flame apprehensively.

With uncanny intelligence the Thing quickly noticed its advantage, and hung about at that point, growing bolder.

"We got to pile up that fire," muttered McGrath. "See here, fellers! I'm goin' out a ways an' draw it to one side, an' one o' you make a run for it."

He looked carefully to his rifle, and ostentatiously went off in the opposite direction, almost disappearing in the dark shadows. It was sheer heroism. The Thing began to circle round toward him. Moung Tha-Dun thought he saw his

opportunity, and raced out to the dying fire. He piled on an armful of brushwood, when the creature saw the trick. With a howl of rage it swung itself back and downward.

"Look out, Tha-Dun!" yelled Travers.

But it was too late.

An enormous leap carried the Thing to the nearest tree. From there it dropped full thirty feet to the ground, and, with a bound, was on him. The wretched man had barely time to draw his heavy dah and slash at the hairy chest, when two long arms shot out and gripped him. There was a quick spurt of blood, a choking shriek, and a dark mass rolled together on the ground. Travers, pale with horror, dodged about, leveling his gun and dropping it again, afraid to fire in that light at the confused heap. Then Moro McGrath rushed past him, right up to the clawing, howling mass of venom and fight, and, thrusting his rifle close up against the thick, hairy neck, pulled both triggers at once.

The heavy charge almost tore the great head from its shoulders. A convulsive shudder tensed the huge frame, and it leaped back, clawing the air. It spun round, tottered a moment over the sheer bank, and then lurched forward into the swift black water beneath. At that moment the flames burst through the fresh pile of brushwood and lit up the ghastly scene. Moung Tha-Dun lay with his neck and back and limbs all twisted into the impossible contortions of a straw dummy. McGrath did not need to lift the broken form.

"Poor devil!" he muttered, turning away his head with his customary qualm. Travers leaned on his gun, white and shaken with horror.

"What was it?" he queried hoarsely.

McGrath looked darkly down the bank where the Thing had disappeared, shaking his head with tightly pressed lips.

"I wonder," he replied finally. "I had a sort o' suspicion; that noise, you know. I'd heard somep'n like it down in Borneo once." He sank into gloomy contemplation again. After a while he added: "An' those two wide bands always; they'd point unmistakable to the grip of some enormously powerful hands an' arms. I'd 'a' said it was a freak specimen of the Mai-As ape, or orang. They sometimes run to a size like that; but—"

"But good God, Moro, what made the thing so malignant? Why should it have become so malevolent?"

"Dunno," said McGrath shortly. Then he added suddenly: "Perhaps the Nat. There's more things in heaven— an' the jungles, son, than all you science sharps know about."

He sat a long while in gloomy introspection. At last he jumped up and shook himself as out of a dream.

"Cm' on, son!" he barked, with swift return of his customary energy. "We got a heap to do before we're through here. I want to get outa this unholy place

with the daylight. I've had enough holiday to go on with for a long time; but— there's promotion for rounding up the last of the Boh's gang— an' I guess you'll be wishful to find a telegraph office in Kindat, an' send about ten dollars' worth o' message to Rangoon city in a hurry."

17: Dolly

The Girl Who was No Good at War Work.

Frank Morton

1869–1923

The Triad, 10 March 1923

Editor, journalist, newspaperman, poet, and novelist, Morton was a prolific writer of short fiction

WHEN THE Benwell boys went to the war, the three sisters stayed at home. They talked a good deal about a scheme they had for becoming nurses, but when they found that becoming a nurse meant no end of hard preparatory work and nastiness, they decided that they'd be V.A.Ds. and get the uniform without the fag. They had already discovered that the uniform worn over *crêpe-de-chine* was seldom or never very fatiguing.

People said that Mrs. Benwell must find her daughters a great comfort, with her four boys over in France. Mrs. Benwell told herself, though she didn't mention this to the neighbours, that Dolly was the only true comfort in her world on the feminine side. Mrs. Benwell was a timid and conservative old lady, but that's that.

Dolly was the daughter-in-law, wife of the only married boy. And Dolly was not a V.A.D. or anything like that. If she wore anything in silk, she didn't flash it. She sang sometimes at patriotic concerts when they asked her to, and she made herself useful in many important small ways; but she did not wear a uniform, she did not attend committee-meetings of any sort, she found subalterns rather a bore, and she would not collect money in the street. People said that for a soldier's wife she was strangely devoid of enthusiasm. There were times when, in her simple heart, she thought so too. She didn't even seem to take great pains to cheer the boys who were still going away. To her own brother— her only relative in the world of her own stock— she said, "Rotten business, old thing; but we've just got to stick it." She had no furtive kisses and squeezes for anybody.

She failed in patriotism, but she did not fail Mrs. Benwell. When Nesta and Inez and Gussy were away having tea with officers or singing on lorries about how they'd kiss the men without discrimination when they came back again (a very reckless thing to do), Dolly was at home helping Mrs. Benwell to feel less lonely.

There is a lot of romantic gush talked about a daughter's love. A son is a son till he gets him a wife, a daughter's a daughter all her life, and so on. Very pretty, of course; but in life you'll often find it different. Daughter takes the colour of the family she marries into, and often has no particular use for mother except

when mother can be of some particular use. Sons are different. The love of a son for his mother is the most beautiful thing in nature, next to the love of a mother for her son.

The Benwell boys at the front wrote mother regularly. The Benwell girls in Sydney stayed out till all hours of the night and were often sour when mother brought them their breakfasts to bed. Dolly slept in Mrs. Benwell's room because she knew mother was lonely, and slept best when she went to sleep talking about the boys. If she woke in the night, Dolly was always waiting to hear more. And so a great fount of mother-love went out to Dolly; a thing altogether unnatural on the face of it. Mrs. Benwell ought to have kept all her mother-love on that side for Nesta and Inez and Gussy, who were putting on silk stockings and sailing very near the edge to save the Empire and make the world safe for democracy. But she didn't.

Not that the Benwell girls cared. They were glad that Dolly pleased Mama. They told each other that Dolly was a bosker kid, and they even went the length of agreeing that such a pretty girl could have a bosker time if she wanted to. Nesta was having a bosker time with a major whose wife was having a bosker time in Melbourne. Inez was having a bosker time with an Irish chaplain and two boys on the Staff. Gussy was having a bosker time with whatever man happened to be about whenever any moment happened. And the Australian Defence Department paid for the cars. Which was very convenient.

It was well on in 1916 when news came that Rupert Benwell was wounded and missing.

Rupert happened to be Dolly's husband and the steadiest of the Benwells.

Dolly kept on being unnatural. She didn't faint or sob for public sympathy. She didn't go into mourning. She just kept on managing the household, pacifying the maid, consoling the cook, and comforting Mrs. Benwell. It seemed that Mrs. Benwell did not mind Dolly's being unnatural. Mrs. Benwell had seen and known love— the genuine article— and could recognize it on sight. The other girls said that women must be brave, and so kept on what they were pleased to call their war-work pretty much as usual.

Three or four more months passed. Two of the three remaining boys were badly wounded, and word came that they were being invalided home. Meantime, had it not been for Dolly, Mrs. Benwell, a very delicate woman, would probably have died of her grief. But Dolly simply wouldn't let her. Dolly said, "You are the only mother I have, and Rupert and I can't spare you." And so, in some way that the doctor considered miraculous, Mrs. Benwell gradually regained her strength and tone.

Then the two boys returned. Dick was twenty-two, and Joe, Gussy's twin, was eighteen. They were cot-cases still, but it was Dolly that insisted that they should be nursed at home and not go to Randwick. The other three girls, who went often to Randwick, raised no objection. Within a month Dick and Joe loved Dolly so well that they were both half in love with her. Tom, the remaining boy at the front, a Colonel at five-and-twenty, wrote cheerfully that he seemed to be shell- and bullet-proof, and all that. There was no word of Rupert.

Then things happened with a rush, as things often do when you're not expecting it. On a dead German at Polygon Wood was found a letter from a girl in Bremen— with a photograph. The letter told of a fine young British officer who was billeted on her folks. He had recovered from bad wounds, but had completely lost his memory, and there seemed to be no way in which he could be identified. She sent a snapshot that she had taken of him. The snapshot was of Rupert Benwell.

This German girl was plainly a very good girl. Things do happen: even such obviously incredible things as that.

Tom, who was in Egypt, got the news no sooner than his mother did, and letters from Mrs. Benwell and Tom reached Elsa at the same time. The three Benwell girls said they simply could not bring themselves to write to a German woman after all these atrocities.

Rupert was exchanged for a German officer of Ludendorff's staff who was minus a leg, and in London Rupert regained his memory. Four weeks later, shaken still and lacking one arm from the elbow, Rupert Benwell was shipped to Australia.

He was met at Woolloomooloo by the whole Benwell family. His greeting of the girls was cordial and brotherly. The mother who can describe a maimed boy's meeting with his mother? As to Rupert's meeting with Dolly, in public there was nothing to describe, but it was noticed later that as he watched his mother and his wife his eyes were very tender.

That night, while the three girls lolled on the verandah at Manly while Dolly and mother saw to the preparations for dinner, Gussy said: "Rupie boy, your Dolly has been a perfect dear; I don't know what mother would have done without her. We were only grieved about one thing: we couldn't get her to take any real interest in war-work."

Then Rupert gave as great offence as any returned Australian officer of distinction could give on his first day home.

"Thank God for that!" said Rupert Benwell.

Elsa, whose youngest brother was killed at Polygon Wood, was a spinster lady of forty, with a clubfoot, a second chin, and spectacles with round bulging green lenses. So there seems to be no sane reason why Rupert should say that next to Dolly and his mother she was the most beautiful woman in the world.

"Tried as by fire, all you beautiful dear women!" Rupert told his dearest two as together they looked at Elsa's amazing photograph.

"God bless you, bless you, bless you... you *woman*!" he said to Dolly.

But that was later.

18: The Merrye Mayde

J. H. M. Abbott

1874-1953

The New Triad, 1 Sep 1927

The author wrote many stories of historical fiction, set in the early days of the Colony of New South Wales.

VISITING his friend, Mr. Gregory Wicks, R.N., the first-lieutenant of H.M.S. *Emu*, on board the brig-of-war, as she lay at anchor in the mouth of Sydney Cove on a sunny afternoon in 1817, Mr. Deputy-Assistant-Commissary-General Pilkington became aware of two important facts. That is to say, they seemed to him to be important, in their bearing upon certain problems having to do with Mr. Wicks' happiness and welfare, with which, in the goodness of his heart, he had recently been concerning himself. One was that seamen are incorrigible sentimentalists, and the other that immature and charming females are the Very Devil.

Mr. Pilkington paced the quarter-deck of the warship, after the fashion of a land-lubber from bulwark to bulwark, instead of fore and aft— plunged in the profoundest meditation. In the Great Cabin in the stern, staring through its big windows at the sparkling surface of Port Jackson, despair and rapture alternately inspiring his unremarkable poetic faculties, sat Mr. Wicks, temporarily in command of the man-o'-war, during the captain's absence on a shooting expedition in the foothills of the Blue Mountains— fatuously engaged in the composition of an ode, or a sonnet, or something equally degrading, in the opinion of Mr. Pilkington, to a gentleman holding His Majesty's commission as an officer of the Royal Navy.

Mr. Pilkington had grown tired of supplying words that rhymed to a person who was never designed by Nature to be a poet, and of giving polite opinions as to lines that did not scan, and meant nothing at all— so had come out of the poop to take the air, and to escape for a time the intolerable company of Mr. Wicks' clod-hopping muse. He had every sympathy for his friend— but felt there were some things that not even friendship of the most unselfish sort could be expected to bear in too liberal measure. One of these was the undivided burden of a lover's confidences.

A goodly and pleasing figure was Mr. Pilkington, as he promenaded back and forth below the break of the poop, immediately in front of the brass-mounted wheel, and between the fat round breaches of the deck's two aftermost guns peeping curiously out at Sydney Harbour through the open square ports that served their offensive functions. The trim neatness and immaculate cleanliness of a man-o'-war, scrubbed and polished and shiny, matched the elegance of his attire and the distinction of his bearing. He could not possibly have looked

better anywhere else than in this fastidiously orderly environment. Alike to the officer of the watch, pacing the poop above his head, telescope under arm, to the red-coated marine sentry at the cabin entrance, to the boatswain, supervising the activities of a working party hoisting stores up from the open hold amidships, and to every member of the ship's company happening to be on deck, his fine figure and splendid raiment seemed to do honour to the ship. His own trimness and tautness emphasized hers.

His ambulatory cogitations were suddenly interrupted by a bellow from the interior of the poop.

"Hi, Brummell, old boy— come in here. I've got it done. Come in here, and I'll read it to you."

With a sigh of resignation, Mr. Pilkington passed by the sentry, and entered the cabin. There was no doubt, he reflected, that if the first-lieutenant's love affairs were troublesome to the peace of mind of that dashing officer, they were infinitely more so to his friends. He had doubts whether such open scoffing as Ensign Calder would have used was not a better policy than the sympathetic attitude he had adopted himself. However, he was much attached to Mr. Wicks, and ruefully reflected that he would be compelled to pay the price of such attachment to the uttermost farthing. He sat down in Captain Fletcher's aim-chair, and prepared himself for the worst.

Mr. Wicks took up some loose sheets of paper from the round table at which he had been writing, and began to pace, back and forward, the length of the low-roofed cabin. There was a look of enthusiasm and exaltation in his face which his guest could not but observe with foreboding. His countenance was flushed, and the spring in his step betrayed a satisfaction with himself that Mr. Pilkington could only regard as ominous. He prepared himself for the worst.

"I've done it, Brum, old boy— and, by Heavens, it reads most stunningly. By Gad, there's no doubt poetry's the stuff to give 'em. Especially those like Pam. No other way to approach 'em, old lad— no other way at all. Just cast your eye over this, and tell me what you think of it."

He held out a sheet of paper to Mr. Pilkington, who received it with gravity and resignation.

Without a smile, he read the first stanza carefully and with an air of respectful admiration for the gifted genius who could produce such verse. Thus it went:

TO PAMELA.
O, Merrye Mayde,
The Moon is Bright,
As it shines by night;
But thy lovely eyes are brighter

Thy smile hath come,
When I am dumb,
To ravish my heart.

When we are apart
My Soul is sore,
And I know no Law,
Save of the love
To you I bear—
O, Lovely and Fayre,
O, Merrye Mayde.

After reading this moving apostrophe carefully, Mr. Pilkington laid the manuscript on his knee and gazed thoughtfully out upon the shining surface of the harbour, whose dancing reflections lit with moving glimmers of light the white ceiling of the cabin. Go on, that's not all of it, Brummell. There are five more verses— and the last one's the best. Damme, I'd no idea I could do as well as that!" said Mr. Wicks. "Shows you what a man can do, when he's properly moved— don't it."

"Egad, yeth, Panthy " (Mr. Wicks had born the nickname of "Pansy " since his callow midshipman days, owing to an affair with a girl at Gosport, who had married the other fellow)— "it motht thertainly doeth. It theemth to me that you would be capable of anything, after that."

"Lud, Brum— you flatter me!" simpered the sailor. "Anyway, 'tis not half good enough for that divine creature— damme if 'tis. But go ahead— you haven't got to the best part of it yet."

Mr. Pilkington rose to his feet, being compelled to bend his head in evidence of a deck beam above. He also shook it mournfully. Why, Panthy—l think not. I fear lam too thutheptible to thuch emotional verthe. I will take it ath wead. But why, may I athk, do you employ thuch— ah— archaic formth of addweth to Mith Magwaine. There ith nothing archaic about that young lady, tho far ath I have ever obtherved. On the contwarwy, I should thay she wath ultwa modern. Why not thpell Mewwy Maid in the uthual way?"

"Oh, dammit, Brum— you're too prosaic. It's romantic to write like that. It appeals to— that is, it is more acceptable to the fair sex, who are all romance and languishings, than the ordinary way of putting things. D——n my tops'ls— you don't mean to say you're not going to dine aboard? Put your hat down. Have a drop of Nelson's Blood. Oh, damme, you're not going yet— are you?"

"I have a little buthineth to attend to, my dear fellow. I pway you will ecthcuthe me. It weally cannot wait. You have my betht witheth, dear boy. But do not, I beg you, thtwain your affectionth too unduly. There are

ithappointmenth, you know— there are ditappointmenth. Au wevoir, Panthy, my buck— au wevoir."

When he landed at the King's Wharf, Mr. Pilkington's business took him immediately to the Barracks, in George Street. Here, he sought out Ensign Calder in his quarters, where he found that young gentleman also busy with pen and paper.

"God bleth my thoul, Patwick," he exclaimed, as he entered the subaltern's bed-sitting room, and saw what he was at— "have you altho wooed the Muthe?"

"Have I done what?"

I wondered, my dear Patwick, whether you, altho, had taken to verthe-making. I have had quite enough of the thothiety of the poetic muthe thith afternoon to thuffithe me for a long time. I twutht 'tith not ath bad ath that with you, old Pathy-lad. I do, indeed!"

"What the Devil— me make verses! Gad, no— I'm engaged in the entirely prosaic transaction, my dear Brum, of staving off a dun. That's all I'm doing. But who's been making up poetry."

"The unfortunate Panthy— he hath a bad attack of it. Vewy bad, indeed."

"Good Lord— what's gone wrong with him ?"

"The lovely daughter of my wevered and venerwated Chief— Miss Pamela Magraine. She hath bewitched our gallant tarry-bweekth. He'th made a poem— or thomething that ith intended for a poem— about a yard long. The wortht poem I've ever encountered— I atthure you it ith, Patwick. A vewy damnable and detholating poem. In thyort, it may be thaid to be a H——l of a poem. The vewy limit. But whath the matter, Pathy?"

Mr. Calder had risen to his feet, whistling his astonishment.

"Well, I'll be double d—— d!" he ejaculated. "That little sinner! God save the kittens! Our old Pansy!"

Mr. Pilkington raised his eyebrows.

"Well, but the pretty little Pam, my dear Pat— if a fellowth going to get thkirt-thtwuck— well, he might do worthe, mightn't he? Quite a jolly little girl, ithn't thye ? In thome wayth— if he wathn't thuch an accurthed bore over it, I'd be inclined to ecthtend congwatulationth to the gallant tar upon hith good tathte. Yeth, there are far leth fetching little fillieth in the thettlement than Pam Magwaine— even if her thilly old father ith the biggetht ath in New Thouth Waleth. I don't blame Gweg a bit— ecthept for hith twuly awful poetwy. Not a bit."

"H-m — I don't know," observed Mr. Calder, with an air of doubt. "You see, Brum, old boy— I happen to know a bit about the lovely little Pam. I'll admit that, so far as looks go, she's everything that might be desired. The best eyes, and the finest complexion— all her own, too— in the colony. And her hair's so

glorious. But of all the little she-devils who ever existed, commend to me that same little spitfire. Why," he went on, in an injured tone, " I went to kiss her, once— as anyone might pay such a compliment to a pretty girl— and d'ye know what she did to me? Why, dammit, she actually doubled up her little fist and hit me in the nose. And then she took it between her finger and thumb and nearly twisted it off my d d face. Oh, d——n her— she's a little bit too strong!"

"Weally, now! You dithturb me, Patwick. If Mith Magwaine ith thuch a termagant ath all that— well, she'th thurely no fit mate for our hearty thailor-lad, ith she? It wouldn't do at all. Why, Panthy'd alwayth be havin' hith nothe pulled, and hith earth boxed. Hith ugly old dial would be perpetually in hothpital. And tho would hith tender heart. No, no— we mutht thave our fwiend fwom thuch a fate ath that. Too good a fellow, old Gwegorwy, to be thacwefithed on the altar of a shrew. By the way," he asked Mr. Calder, brightening at the idea— "might it not be possible for Panthy to tame the shrew? How about that athpect?"

"Tame her ? How d'ye mean tame her?"

"Well, to convert her to gentler wayth, you know. There are many methodth of tweatment that may be applied to thuch hard catheth. He might come the thtwong man, and—"

Ensign Calder interrupted him impatiently.

"Oh, don't talk d d foolishness, Brummell. The only way to tame that little vixen would be by knocking her on the head— and giving her another knock every time she came to herself again. I tried the bold, strong-man-dodge, when I went to kiss her— and look what I got for it. Better to bust up the whole affair— that's what I think. To queer Pansy's prospects with the little devil— that's the only way to save him."

Mr. Pilkington sighed and rose to his feet. For a minute, he paced the floor of the barrack in deep meditation. When he spoke, it was with the air of one who has made up his mind.

"Vewy well, then, Patwick. We will dwive out to New Town on Thaturday afternoon, and will devithe thtepth, in the meantime, to thpoil thith unthuitable match. ' Tith not, of courthe, thtwictly thpeaking, our affair at all— but Panthy ith the dear fwiend of both of uth. He mutht be thaved. 'Tith our unpleathant duty to thave him fwom hith impending fate. You will come with me on Thaturday, Patwick?"

"Oh, yes— of course. I've a high regard for Pansy Wicks. I'll go with you— though it's dangerous. A d——d ticklish business, interfering in the affairs of that young woman. But I'll chance it— for Gregory's sake."

THE DRAWING-ROOM at Wellington Villa, the imposing homestead of Mr. Commissary-General Magraine's estate on the Parramatta Road, out beyond the

swamps at the head of what we now call Darling Harbour— which was then known as Cockle Bay— was furnished and decorated much as might have been expected by any who knew its owner. His firm belief that he resembled the great Duke, not only in appearance, but in character, was reflected on its walls to an impressive degree. Several portraits of the victor of Waterloo at different stages of his career, framed copies of some of his shorter despatches, and relics from Peninsular battlefields were the principal objects of interest to be observed in its scheme of decoration. A huge portrait, by John Read, the Elder, of Mr. Charles Magraine hung above the mantel, and was labelled "The Valiant Arthur." Crossed muskets above the door, spherical shells on the occasional tables, draperies that were made up of torn and weathered Union Jacks and regimental guidons, ornamenting the windows, shouted aloud to all who entered the room, "War— and Wellington, the God of War."

To the scarlet-clad Ensign Calder, and the magnificent Mr. Pilkington, there entered such a vision of diminutive female loveliness, ten minutes after their arrival at Wellington Villa, as might have appealed to them to refrain from interference. But they both felt the call of duty in a righteous and overwhelming fashion. This exquisite little bit of femininity was not going to hoodwink them with dainty mannerisms and alluring charms. Their guileless sailor was to be saved at all costs. That was why they were there, and that was going to be the result of their visit to this siren's lair.

"And why," presently asked their hostess, as she dispensed tea from a silver urn that had the appearance of a bombing mortar, sugaring it from half a shell case most elegantly mounted on a silver representation of a cheval-de-frise— "why, pray, Mr. Pilkington, have you not brought with you Lieutenant Wicks? I had thought that you three were quite inseparable— even for an afternoon— when your duties did not forbid your enjoying one another's society. Gregory," she flushed prettily— "I mean Mr. Wicks, has assured me 'tis so. Why is he not here?"

Mr. Pilkington cleared his throat, a little nervously.

"Well, you thee, my dear Mith Pamela, our Gwegorwy hath not been himthelf of late. Not by a gweat deal. He appearth to have fallen motht fatuouthly in love with thome girl or other, and con- thequently ith not fit company for man or beatht. Bethideth, hith habith of life are not thuch, in thetbe dayth, ath appeal to Mr. Calder and mythelf. There are limith to everything, you know. For our weputationth thaketh, we cannot afford to allow ourthelveth to be compwomithed by indulging in the thort of amuthementh that latterly theem to have abthorbed Mr. Wickth. They— ah— are not done, in polite thothiety, you know. Thomething of a coldneth hath grown up between poor Gwegorwy and Mr. Calder and mythelf— which we infinitely wegwet, but are powerleth to alter. Motht dithtwething, it hath been to me. And to you,

altho, hath it not, Patwick ? Oh, vewy lamentable— but quite unavoidable, I atthure you, Mith Pamela."

The little blonde beauty glanced from one hypocrite to another— but her expression gave no hint of the amusement that possessed her. Merely was it such as might be called for by a polite interest in a subject of conversation that might, quite as interestingly, have been anything else. She laughed delightedly.

"Dear me— and is our gallant sailorboy become something of a rake, then— that you two gentlemen, for the sake of your reputations, should be distressed by having to throw his society aside ? What a pity! La, la— these men!" she sighed, shaking her glorious head demurely. "You never can tell— can you?"

Mr. Calder nodded with affected gloom.

"Yes— I'm sorry to say, Greg Wicks has become a bit too strong, even for me— and I'm not particular. But there are limits, as Arthur says— there are some things that are not done, in the society of gentlemen. I am sorry for Mr. Wicks. I really am."

The lovely Pamela laughed a little demure laugh.

"Well, so am I. See what he sent me yesterday. It seems that I am the 'some girl or other,' as Mr. Pilkington says, who has made Mr. Wicks fatuous. Look at this. It is really too awful for words! Read it, gentlemen— l beg you. Oh, no— I cannot regard it as confidential. It is too absurd. Too, too utterly absurd. I think that Mr. Wicks should be put under restraint. I do— really."

From a work-box on a chair beside her, she took a folded manuscript, tied daintily with a ribbon of pink silk, and handed it to Mr. Pilkington.

For ten minutes the friends thoroughly enjoyed themselves, at the expense of the absent member of their unholy trinity, pretty Miss Magraine joining in their mirth with a heartiness that delighted them. When she left the room for a moment— some household duty, she explained, that simply had to be attended to— Mr. Pilkington turned to Mr. Calder, and remarked triumphantly:

"Well, now, Patwick— I think we may congwatulate ourthelveth that our little wuthe hath been entirely thucthethful. Don't you think tho ? The power of widicule— tith overwhelming. Thimply unwethiththtible. Why, she thimply lookth upon Panthy ath an abthurdity— a joke! I am delighted that we were able to do him thuch a thervithe. But I mutht thay sheth a charming little cweature. Delightful! But we can't have old Gwegorwy getting hith nothe bwoke everwy thecond day. He'll never know what we've done for him— of courthe not. But we have our own good conthienth, my dear Panthy. We can thank ourthelveth on hith behalf, whenever we think of what we've done for him."

They strolled together to one of the big windows in the front of the house, and were looking out over the fields towards the thin smoke of distant Sydney, curling above the crest of Brickfield Hill. Before Mr. Calder could voice, in turn, his sentiments of satisfaction at the successful issue of their visit, they were

greeted by a burst of hearty laughter behind them. They turned immediately, startled. It was a laugh with which they were very intimately acquainted.

In the doorway stood Lieutenant Gregory Wicks, R.N., his right shoulder stooped a little because his strong right arm encircled the waist of dainty, beautiful, and charming Pamela Magraine, whose golden masses of hair did not reach quite to his epaulette. She was laughing merrily— but, suddenly, her face became fierce and wrathful.

"There, darling Gregory— look at your friends— your true and faithful companions, who, you have assured me, would die for you, if 'twere necessary. Oh," she exclaimed, venomously— "you wretched vipers! For two pins I would smack your faces. Please go, while I'm able to restrain myself. You monsters! Oh, kiss me, Gregory. I'm glad you're not a man of that sort. You precious angel. I think your verse is lovely. Nothing but lovely."

As they confusedly bowed themselves from the room, Messrs. Calder and Pilkington had a vision of two blue arms about a white, muslin clad, dainty shoulders, and of two not ill-looking faces in the closest contact. As they left the front door to seek the shelter of Mr. Pilkington's curricle, a hearty voice, full of laughter, smote their ears, as it came chiming down the hall into the sunny afternoon

"What dogs you are! Go home and seek another bone."

"God's bald head!" murmured Mr. Calder.

"Phew!" gasped Mr. Pilkington.

19: The Perfect Life

F. Scott Fitzgerald

1896-1940

The Saturday Evening Post, 5 Jan 1929

Collected in: *Taps at Reveille*, 1935

WHEN HE CAME INTO the dining room, a little tired, but with his clothes hanging cool and free on him after his shower, the whole school stood up and clapped and cheered until he slunk down into his seat. From one end of the table to the other, people leaned forward and smiled at him.

"Nice work, Lee. Not your fault we didn't win."

Basil knew that he had been good. Up to the last whistle he could feel his expended energy miraculously replacing itself after each surpassing effort. But he couldn't realize his success all at once, and only little episodes lingered with him, such as when that shaggy Exeter tackle stood up big in the line and said, "Let's get that quarter! He's yellow." Basil shouted back, "Yellow your gra'mother!" and the linesman grinned good-naturedly, knowing it wasn't true. During that gorgeous hour bodies had no weight or force; Basil lay under piles of them, tossed himself in front of them without feeling the impact, impatient only to be on his feet dominating those two green acres once more. At the end of the first half he got loose for sixty yards and a touchdown, but the whistle had blown and it was not allowed. That was the high point of the game for St. Regis. Outweighed ten pounds to the man, they wilted down suddenly in the fourth quarter and Exeter put over two touchdowns, glad to win over a school whose membership was only one hundred and thirty-five.

When lunch was over and the school was trooping out of the dining hall, the Exeter coach came over to Basil and said:

"Lee, that was about the best game I've ever seen played by a prep-school back, and I've seen a lot of them."

Doctor Bacon beckoned to him. He was standing with two old St. Regis boys, up from Princeton for the day.

"It was a very exciting game, Basil. We are all very proud of the team and— ah— especially of you." And, as if this praise had been an indiscretion, he hastened to add: "And of all the others."

He presented him to the two alumni. One of them, John Granby, Basil knew by reputation. He was said to be a "big man" at Princeton— serious, upright, handsome, with a kindly smile and large, earnest blue eyes. He had graduated from St. Regis before Basil entered.

"That was pretty work, Lee!" Basil made the proper deprecatory noises. "I wonder if you've got a moment this afternoon when we could have a little talk."

"Why, yes, sir." Basil was flattered. "Any time you say."

"Suppose we take a walk about three o'clock. My train goes at five."

"I'd like to very much."

He walked on air to his room in the Sixth Form House. One short year ago he had been perhaps the most unpopular boy at St. Regis —"Bossy" Lee. Only occasionally did people forget and call him "Bossy" now, and then they corrected themselves immediately.

A youngster leaned out of the window of Mitchell House as he passed and cried, "Good work!" The negro gardener, trimming a hedge, chuckled and called, "You almost beatum by y' own self." Mr. Hicks the housemaster cried, "They ought to have given you that touchdown! That was a crime!" as Basil passed his door. It was a frosty gold October day, tinged with the blue smoke of Indian summer, weather that set him dreaming of future splendors, triumphant descents upon cities, romantic contacts with mysterious and scarcely mortal girls. In his room he floated off into an ambulatory dream in which he walked up and down repeating to himself tag ends of phrases: "by a prep-school back, and I've seen a lot of them."... "Yellow your gra'mother!"... "You get off side again and I'll kick your fat bottom for you!"

Suddenly he rolled on his bed with laughter. The threatened one had actually apologized between quarters— it was Pork Corrigan who only last year had chased him up two flights of stairs.

At three he met John Granby and they set off along the Grunwald Pike, following a long, low red wall that on fair mornings always suggested to Basil an adventurous quest like in "The Broad Highway." John Granby talked awhile about Princeton, but when he realized that Yale was an abstract ideal deep in Basil's heart, he gave up. After a moment a far-away expression, a smile that seemed a reflection of another and brighter world, spread over his handsome face.

"Lee, I love St. Regis School," he said suddenly. "I spent the happiest years of my life here. I owe it a debt I can never repay." Basil didn't answer and Granby turned to him suddenly. "I wonder if you realize what you could do here."

"What? Me?"

"I wonder if you know the effect on the whole school of that wonderful game you played this morning."

"It wasn't so good."

"It's like you to say that," declared Granby emphatically, "but it isn't the truth. However, I didn't come out here to sing your praises. Only I wonder if you realize your power for good. I mean your power of influencing all these boys to lead clean, upright, decent lives."

"I never thought about that," said Basil, somewhat startled; "I never thought about—"

Granby slapped him smartly on the shoulder.

"Since this morning a responsibility has come to you that you can't dodge. From this morning every boy in this school who goes around smoking cigarettes behind the gym and reeking with nicotine is a little bit your responsibility; every bit of cursing and swearing, or of learning to take the property of others by stealing milk and food supplies out of the pantry at night is a little bit your responsibility."

He broke off. Basil looked straight ahead, frowning.

"Gee!" he said.

"I mean it," continued Granby, his eyes shining. "You have the sort of opportunity very few boys have. I'm going to tell you a little story. Up at Princeton I knew two boys who were wrecking their lives with drink. I could have said, 'It's not my affair,' and let them go to pieces their own way, but when I looked deep into my own heart I found I couldn't. So I went to them frankly and put it up to them fairly and squarely, and those two boys haven't— at least one of them hasn't— touched a single drop of liquor from that day to this."

"But I don't think anybody in school drinks," objected Basil. "At least there was a fellow named Bates that got fired last year—"

"It doesn't matter," John Granby interrupted. "Smoking leads to drinking and drinking leads to— other things."

For an hour Granby talked and Basil listened; the red wall beside the road and the apple-heavy branches overhead seemed to become less vivid minute by minute as his thoughts turned inward. He was deeply affected by what he considered the fine unselfishness of this man who took the burdens of others upon his shoulders. Granby missed his train, but he said that didn't matter if he had succeeded in planting a sense of responsibility in Basil's mind.

Basil returned to his room awed, sobered and convinced. Up to this time he had always considered himself rather bad; in fact, the last hero character with which he had been able to identify himself was Hairbreadth Harry in the comic supplement, when he was ten. Though he often brooded, his brooding was dark and nameless and never concerned with moral questions. The real restraining influence on him was fear— the fear of being disqualified from achievement and power.

But this meeting with John Granby had come at a significant moment. After this morning's triumph, life at school scarcely seemed to hold anything more— and here was something new. To be perfect, wonderful inside and out— as Granby had put it, to try to lead the perfect life. Granby had outlined the perfect life to him, not without a certain stress upon its material rewards such as honor and influence at college, and Basil's imagination was already far in the future. When he was tapped last man for Skull and Bones at Yale and shook his head with a sad sweet smile, somewhat like John Granby's, pointing to another man who wanted it more, a burst of sobbing would break from the assembled crowd.

Then, out into the world, where, at the age of twenty-five, he would face the nation from the inaugural platform on the Capitol steps, and all around him his people would lift up their faces in admiration and love....

As he thought he absent-mindedly consumed half a dozen soda crackers and a bottle of milk, left from a pantry raid the night before. Vaguely he realized that this was one of the things he was giving up, but he was very hungry. However, he reverently broke off the train of his reflections until he was through.

Outside his window the autumn dusk was split with shafts of lights from passing cars. In these cars were great football players and lovely débutantes, mysterious adventuresses and international spies— rich, gay, glamorous people moving toward brilliant encounters in New York, at fashionable dances and secret cafés, or on roof gardens under the autumn moon. He sighed; perhaps he could blend in these more romantic things later. To be of great wit and conversational powers, and simultaneously strong and serious and silent. To be generous and open and self-sacrificing, yet to be somewhat mysterious and sensitive and even a little bitter with melancholy. To be both light and dark. To harmonize this, to melt all this down into a single man— ah, there was something to be done. The very thought of such perfection crystallized his vitality into an ecstasy of ambition. For a moment longer his soul followed the speeding lights toward the metropolis; then resolutely he arose, put out his cigarette on the window sill, and turning on his reading lamp, began to note down a set of requirements for the perfect life.

ii

ONE MONTH later George Dorsey, engaged in the painful duty of leading his mother around the school grounds, reached the comparative seclusion of the tennis courts and suggested eagerly that she rest herself upon a bench.

Hitherto his conversation had confined itself to a few hoarse advices, such as "That's the gym,"... "That's Cuckoo Conklin that teaches French. Everybody hates him."... "Please don't call me 'Brother' in front of boys." Now his face took on the preoccupied expression peculiar to adolescents in the presence of their parents. He relaxed. He waited to be asked things.

"Now, about Thanksgiving, George. Who is this boy you're bringing home?"

"His name is Basil Lee."

"Tell me something about him."

"There isn't anything to tell. He's just a boy in the Sixth Form, about sixteen."

"Is he a nice boy?"

"Yes. He lives in St. Paul, Minnesota. I asked him a long time ago."

A certain reticence in her son's voice interested Mrs. Dorsey.

"Do you mean you're sorry you asked him? Don't you like him any more?"

"Sure I like him."

"Because there's no use bringing anyone you don't like. You could just explain that your mother has made other plans."

"But I like him," George insisted, and then he added hesitantly: "It's just some funny way he's got to be lately."

"How?"

"Oh, just sort of queer."

"But how, George? I don't want you to bring anyone into the house that's queer."

"He isn't exactly queer. He just gets people aside and talks to them. Then he sort of smiles at them."

Mrs. Dorsey was mystified. "Smiles at them?"

"Yeah. He gets them off in a corner somewheres and talks to them as long as they can stand it, and then he smiles"— his own lips twisted into a peculiar grimace— "like that."

"What does he talk about?"

"Oh, about swearing and smoking and writing home and a lot of stuff like that. Nobody pays any attention except one boy he's got doing the same thing. He got stuck up or something because he was so good at football."

"Well, if you don't want him, don't let's have him."

"Oh, no," George cried in alarm. "I've got to have him. I asked him."

Naturally, Basil was unaware of this conversation when, one morning, a week later, the Dorseys' chauffeur relieved them of their bags in the Grand Central station. There was a slate-pink light over the city and people in the streets carried with them little balloons of frosted breath. About them the buildings broke up through many planes toward heaven, at their base the wintry color of an old man's smile, on through diagonals of diluted gold, edged with purple where the cornices floated past the stationary sky.

In a long, low, English town car— the first of the kind that Basil had ever seen— sat a girl of about his own age. As they came up she received her brother's kiss perfunctorily, nodded stiffly to Basil and murmured, "how-d'y'-do" without smiling. She said nothing further but seemed absorbed in meditations of her own. At first, perhaps because of her extreme reserve, Basil received no especial impression of her, but before they reached the Dorseys' house he began to realize that she was one of the prettiest girls he had ever seen in his life.

It was a puzzling face. Her long eyelashes lay softly against her pale cheeks, almost touching them, as if to conceal the infinite boredom in her eyes, but when she smiled, her expression was illumined by a fiery and lovely friendliness, as if she were saying, "Go on; I'm listening. I'm fascinated. I've been waiting— oh, ages— for just this moment with you." Then she remembered that she was

shy or bored; the smile vanished, the gray eyes half closed again. Almost before it had begun, the moment was over, leaving a haunting and unsatisfied curiosity behind.

The Dorseys' house was on Fifty-third Street. Basil was astonished first at the narrowness of its white stone front and then at the full use to which the space was put inside. The formal chambers ran the width of the house, artificial sunlight bloomed in the dining-room windows, a small elevator navigated the five stories in deferential silence. For Basil there was a new world in its compact luxury. It was thrilling and romantic that a foothold on this island was more precious than the whole rambling sweep of the James J. Hill house at home. In his excitement the feel of school dropped momentarily away from him. He was possessed by the same longing for a new experience, that his previous glimpses of New York had aroused. In the hard bright glitter of Fifth Avenue, in this lovely girl with no words to waste beyond a mechanical "How-d'y'-do," in the perfectly organized house, he recognized nothing, and he knew that to recognize nothing in his surroundings was usually a guaranty of adventure.

But his mood of the last month was not to be thrown off so lightly. There was now an ideal that came first. A day mustn't pass when he wasn't, as John Granby put it, "straight with himself"— and that meant to help others. He could get in a good deal of work on George Dorsey in these five days; other opportunities might turn up, besides. Meanwhile, with the consciousness of making the best of both worlds, he unpacked his grip and got ready for luncheon.

He sat beside Mrs. Dorsey, who found him somewhat precipitately friendly in a Midwestern way, but polite, apparently not unbalanced. He told her he was going to be a minister and immediately he didn't believe it himself; but he saw that it interested Mrs. Dorsey and let it stand.

The afternoon was already planned; they were going dancing— for those were the great days: Maurice was tangoing in "Over the River," the Castles were doing a swift stiff-legged walk in the third act of "The Sunshine Girl"— a walk that gave the modern dance a social position and brought the nice girl into the café, thus beginning a profound revolution in American life. The great rich empire was feeling its oats and was out for some not too plebeian, yet not too artistic, fun.

By three o'clock seven young people were assembled, and they started in a limousine for Emil's. There were two stylish, anæmic girls of sixteen— one bore an impressive financial name— and two freshmen from Harvard who exchanged private jokes and were attentive only to Jobena Dorsey. Basil expected that presently everyone would begin asking each other such familiar questions as "Where do you go to school?" and "Oh, do you know So-and-So?" and the party would become more free and easy, but nothing of the sort happened. The

atmosphere was impersonal; he doubted if the other four guests knew his name. "In fact," he thought, "it's just as if everyone's waiting for some one else to make a fool of himself." Here again was something new and unrecognizable; he guessed that it was a typical part of New York.

They reached Emil's. Only in certain Paris restaurants where the Argentines step untiringly through their native coils does anything survive of the dance craze as it existed just before the war. At that time it was not an accompaniment to drinking or love-making or hailing in the dawn— it was an end in itself. Sedentary stockbrokers, grandmothers of sixty, Confederate veterans, venerable statesmen and scientists, sufferers from locomotor ataxia, wanted not only to dance but to dance beautifully. Fantastic ambitions bloomed in hitherto sober breasts, violent exhibitionism cropped out in families modest for generations. Nonentities with long legs became famous overnight, and there were rendezvous where they could renew the dance, if they wished, next morning. Because of a neat glide or an awkward stumble careers were determined and engagements were made or broken, while the tall Englishman and the girl in the Dutch cap called the tune.

As they went into the cabaret sudden anxiety attacked Basil— modern dancing was one of the things upon which John Granby had been most severe.

He approached George Dorsey in the coat room.

"There's an extra man, so do you suppose I'd be all right if I only danced when there's a waltz? I'm no good at anything else."

"Sure. It's all right with me." He looked curiously at Basil. "Gosh, have you sworn off everything?"

"No, not everything," answered Basil uncomfortably.

The floor was already crowded. All ages and several classes of society shuffled around tensely to the nervous, disturbing beats of "Too Much Mustard." Automatically the other three couples were up and away, leaving Basil at the table. He watched, trying to pretend to himself that he disapproved of it all but was too polite to show it. However, with so much to see, it was difficult to preserve that attitude, and he was gazing with fascination at Jobena's active feet when a good-looking young man of about nineteen sat down beside him at the table.

"Excuse me," he said with exaggerated deference. "This Miss Jobena Dorsey's table?"

"Yes, it is."

"I'm expected. Name's De Vinci. Don't ask me if I'm any relation to the painter."

"My name's Lee."

"All right, Lee. What'll you have? What are you having?" The waiter arrived with a tray, and De Vinci looked at its contents with disgust. "Tea— all tea....

Waiter, bring me a double Bronx.... How about you, Lee? Another double Bronx?"

"Oh, no, thanks," said Basil quickly.

"One then, waiter."

De Vinci sighed; he had the unmistakable lush look of a man who has been drinking hard for several days.

"Nice dog under that table over there. They oughtn't to let people smoke if they're going to bring dogs in here."

"Why?"

"Hurts their eyes."

Confusedly Basil deliberated this piece of logic.

"But don't talk to me about dogs," said De Vinci with a profound sigh; "I'm trying to keep from thinking of dogs."

Basil obligingly changed the subject for him by asking him if he was in college.

"Two weeks." For emphasis De Vinci held up two fingers. "I passed quickly through Yale. First man fired out of '15 Sheff."

"That's too bad," said Basil earnestly. He took a deep breath and his lips twisted up in a kindly smile. "Your parents must have felt pretty badly about that."

De Vinci stared at him as if over a pair of spectacles, but before he could answer, the dance ended and the others came back to the table.

"Hello there, Skiddy."

"Well, well, Skiddy!"

They all knew him. One of the freshmen yielded him a place next to Jobena and they began to talk together in lowered voices.

"Skiddy De Vinci," George whispered to Basil. "He and Jobena were engaged last summer, but I think she's through." He shook his head. "They used to go off in his mother's electric up at Bar Harbor; it was disgusting."

Basil glowed suddenly with excitement as if he had been snapped on like an electric torch. He looked at Jobena— her face, infinitely reserved, lightened momentarily, but this time her smile had gone sad; there was the deep friendliness but not the delight. He wondered if Skiddy De Vinci cared about her being through with him. Perhaps, if he reformed and stopped drinking and went back to Yale, she would change her mind.

The music began again. Basil stared uncomfortably into his cup of tea.

"This is a tango," said George. "You can dance the tango, can't you? It's all right; it's Spanish."

Basil considered.

"Sure you can," insisted George. "It's Spanish, I tell you. There's nothing to stop your dancing if it's Spanish, is there?"

One of the freshmen looked at them curiously. Basil leaned over the table and asked Jobena to dance.

She made a last low-voiced remark to De Vinci before she rose; then, to atone for the slight rudeness, she smiled up at Basil. He was light-headed as they moved out on the floor.

Abruptly she made an outrageous remark and Basil started and nearly stumbled, doubtful that he had heard aright.

"I'll bet you've kissed about a thousand girls in your time," she said, "with that mouth."

"What!"

"Not so?"

"Oh, no," declared Basil. "Really, I—"

Her lids and lashes had drooped again indifferently; she was singing the band's tune:

"Tango makes you warm inside;

You bend and sway and glide;

There's nothing far and wide —"

What was the implication— that kissing people was all right; was even admirable? He remembered what John Granby had said: "Every time you kiss a nice girl you may have started her on the road to the devil."

He thought of his own past— an afternoon on the Kampf's porch with Minnie Bibble, a ride home from Black Bear Lake with Imogene Bissel in the back seat of the car, a miscellany of encounters running back to games of post office and to childish kisses that were consummated upon an unwilling nose or ear.

That was over; he was never going to kiss another girl until he found the one who would become his wife. It worried him that this girl whom he found lovely should take the matter so lightly. The strange thrill he had felt when George spoke of her "behaving disgustingly" with Skiddy De Vinci in his electric, was transformed into indignation— steadily rising indignation. It was criminal— a girl not yet seventeen.

Suddenly it occurred to him that this was perhaps his responsibility, his opportunity. If he could implant in her mind the futility of it all, the misery she was laying up for herself, his visit to New York would not have been in vain. He could go back to school happy, knowing he had brought to one girl the sort of peace she had never known before.

In fact, the more he thought of Jobena and Skiddy De Vinci in the electric, the madder it made him.

At five they left Emil's to go to Castle House. There was a thin rain falling and the streets were gleaming. In the excitement of going out into the twilight Jobena slipped her arm quickly through Basil's.

"There's too many for the car. Let's take the hansom."

She gave the address to a septuagenarian in faded bottle green, and the slanting doors closed upon them, shutting them back away from the rain.

"I'm tired of them," she whispered. "Such empty faces, except Skiddy's, and in another hour he won't be able to even talk straight. He's beginning to get maudlin about his dog Eggshell that died last month, and that's always a sign. Do you ever feel the fascination of somebody that's doomed; who just goes on and on in the way he was born to go, never complaining, never hoping; just sort or resigned to it all?"

His fresh heart cried out against this.

"Nobody has to go to pieces," he assured her. "They can just turn over a new leaf."

"Not Skiddy."

"Anybody," he insisted. "You just make up your mind and resolve to live a better life, and you'd be surprised how easy it is and how much happier you are."

She didn't seem to hear him.

"Isn't it nice, rolling along in this hansom with the damp blowing in, and you and I back here"— she turned to him and smiled— "together."

"Yes," said Basil abstractedly. "The thing is that everybody should try to make their life perfect. They can't start young enough; in fact, they ought to start about eleven or twelve in order to make their life absolutely perfect."

"That's true," she said. "In a way Skiddy's life is perfect. He never worries, never regrets. You could put him back at the time of the— oh, the eighteenth century, or whenever it was they had the bucks and beaux— and he'd fit right in."

"I didn't mean that," said Basil in alarm. "That isn't at all what I mean by the perfect life."

"You mean something more masterful," she supplied. "I thought so, when I saw that chin of yours. I'll bet you just take everything you want."

Again she looked at him, swayed close to him.

"You don't understand —" he began.

She put her hand on his arm. "Wait a minute; we're almost there. Let's not go in yet. It's so nice with all the lights going on and it'll be so hot and crowded in there. Tell him to drive out a few blocks more. I noticed you only danced a few times; I like that. I hate men that pop up at the first sound of music as if their life depended on it. Is it true you're only sixteen?"

"Yes."

"You seem older. There's so much in your face."

"You don't understand—" Basil began again desperately.

She spoke through the trap to the cabby:

"Go up Broadway till we tell you to stop." Sitting back in the cab, she repeated dreamily, "The perfect life. I'd like my life to be perfect. I'd like to suffer, if I could find something worth suffering for, and I'd like to never do anything low or small or mean, but just have big sins."

"Oh, no!" said Basil, aghast. "That's no way to feel; that's morbid. Why, look, you oughtn't to talk like that— a girl sixteen years old. You ought to— to talk things over with yourself— you ought to think more of the after life." He stopped, half expecting to be interrupted, but Jobena was silent. "Why, up to a month ago I used to smoke as many as twelve or fifteen cigarettes a day, unless I was training for football. I used to curse and swear and only write home once in a while, so they had to telegraph sometimes to see if I was sick. I had no sense of responsibility. I never thought I could lead a perfect life until I tried."

He paused, overcome by his emotion.

"Didn't you?" said Jobena, in a small voice.

"Never. I was just like everybody else, only worse. I used to kiss girls and never think anything about it."

"What— what changed you?"

"A man I met." Suddenly he turned to her and, with an effort, caused to spread over his face a caricature of John Granby's sad sweet smile. "Jobena, you— you have the makings of a fine girl in you. It grieved me a lot this afternoon to see you smoking nicotine and dancing modern suggestive dances that are simply savagery. And the way you talk about kissing. What if you meet some man that has kept himself pure and never gone around kissing anybody except his family, and you have to tell him that you went around behaving disgustingly?"

She leaned back suddenly and spoke crisply through the panel.

"You can go back now— the address we gave you."

"You ought to cut it out." Again Basil smiled at her, straining and struggling to lift her up out of herself to a higher plane. "Promise me you'll try. It isn't so hard. And then some day when some upright and straightforward man comes along and says, 'Will you marry me?' you'll be able to say you never danced suggestive modern dances, except the Spanish tango and the Boston, and you never kissed anybody— that is, since you were sixteen, and maybe you wouldn't have to say that you ever kissed anybody at all."

"That wouldn't be the truth," she said in an odd voice. "Shouldn't I tell him the truth?"

"You could tell him you didn't know any better."

"Oh."

To Basil's regret the cab drew up at Castle House. Jobena hurried in, and to make up for her absence, devoted herself exclusively to Skiddy and the Harvard freshmen for the remainder of the afternoon. But doubtless she was thinking

hard— as he had done a month before. With a little more time he could have clinched his argument by showing the influence that one leading a perfect life could exert on others. He must find an opportunity tomorrow.

But next day he scarcely saw her. She was out for luncheon and she did not appear at her rendezvous with Basil and George after the matinée; they waited in vain in the Biltmore grill for an hour. There was company at dinner and Basil began to feel a certain annoyance when she disappeared immediately afterwards. Was it possible that his seriousness had frightened her? In that case it was all the more necessary to see her, reassure her, bind her with the invisible cords of high purpose to himself. Perhaps— perhaps she was the ideal girl that he would some day marry. At the gorgeous idea his whole being was flooded with ecstasy. He planned out the years of waiting, each one helping the other to lead the perfect life, neither of them ever kissing anybody else— he would insist on that, absolutely insist on it; she must promise not even to see Skiddy De Vinci— and then marriage and a life of service, perfection, fame and love.

The two boys went to the theatre again that night. When they came home a little after eleven, George went upstairs to say good night to his mother, leaving Basil to make reconnaissance in the ice box. The intervening pantry was dark and as he fumbled unfamiliarly for the light he was startled by hearing a voice in the kitchen pronounce his name:

"—Mr. Basil Duke Lee."

"Seemed all right to me." Basil recognized the drawling tone of Skiddy De Vinci. "Just a kid."

"On the contrary, he's a nasty little prig," said Jobena decisively. "He gave me the old-fashioned moral lecture about nicotine and modern dancing and kissing, and about that upright, straightforward man that was going to come along some day— you know that upright straightforward man they're always talking about. I suppose he meant himself, because he told me he led a perfect life. Oh, it was all so oily and horrible, it made me positively sick. Skiddy. For the first time in my life I was tempted to take a cocktail."

"Oh, he's just a kid," said Skiddy moderately. "It's a phase. He'll get over it."

Basil listened in horror; his face burning, his mouth ajar. He wanted above all things to get away, but his dismay rooted him to the floor.

"What I think of righteous men couldn't be put on paper," said Jobena after a moment. "I suppose I'm just naturally bad, Skiddy; at least, all my contacts with upright young men have affected me like this."

"Then how about it, Jobena?"

There was a long silence.

"This has done something to me," she said finally. "Yesterday I thought I was through with you, Skiddy, but ever since this happened I've had a vision of a

thousand Mr. Basil Duke Lees, all grown up and asking me to share their perfect lives. I refuse to— definitely. If you like, I'll marry you in Greenwich tomorrow."

iii

AT ONE Basil's light was still burning. Walking up and down his room, he made out case after case for himself, with Jobena in the role of villainness, but each case was wrecked upon the rock of his bitter humiliation. "A nasty little prig"— the words, uttered with conviction and scorn, had driven the high principles of John Granby from his head. He was a slave to his own admirations, and in the past twenty-four hours Jobena's personality had become the strongest force in his life; deep in his heart he believed that what she had said was true.

He woke up on Thanksgiving morning with dark circles rimming his eyes. His bag, packed for immediate departure, brought back the debacle of the night before, and as he lay staring at the ceiling, relaxed by sleep, giant tears welled up into his eyes. An older man might have taken refuge behind the virtue of his intentions, but Basil knew no such refuge. For sixteen years he had gone his own way without direction, due to his natural combativeness and to the fact that no older man save John Granby had yet captured his imagination. Now John Granby had vanished in the night, and it seemed the natural thing to Basil that he should struggle back to rehabilitation unguided and alone.

One thing he knew— Jobena must not marry Skiddy De Vinci. That was a responsibility she could not foist upon him. If necessary, he would go to her father and tell what he knew.

Emerging from his room half an hour later, he met her in the hall. She was dressed in a smart blue street suit with a hobble skirt and a ruff of linen at her throat. Her eyes opened a little and she wished him a polite good morning.

"I've got to talk to you," he said quickly.

"I'm terribly sorry." To his intense discomfort she flashed her smile at him, just as if nothing had happened. "I've only a minute now."

"It's something very important. I know you don't like me—"

"What nonsense!" She laughed cheerfully. "Of course I like you. How did you get such a silly idea in your head?"

Before he could answer, she waved her hand hastily and ran down the stairs.

George had gone to town and Basil spent the morning walking through large deliberate snowflakes in Central Park rehearsing what he should say to Mr. Dorsey.

"It's nothing to me, but I cannot see your only daughter throw away her life on a dissipated man. If I had a daughter of my own who was about to throw

away her life, I would want somebody to tell me, and so I have come to tell you. Of course, after this I cannot stay in your house, and so I bid you good-by."

At quarter after twelve, waiting anxiously in the drawing-room, he heard Mr. Dorsey come in. He rushed downstairs, but Mr. Dorsey had already entered the lift and closed the door. Turning about, Basil raced against the machine to the third story and caught him in the hall.

"In regard to your daughter," he began excitedly— "in regard to your daughter—"

"Well," said Mr. Dorsey, "is something the matter with Jobena?"

"I want to talk to you about her."

Mr. Dorsey laughed. "Are you going to ask her hand in marriage?"

"Oh, no."

"Well, suppose we have a talk after dinner when we're full of turkey and stuffing, and feeling happy."

He clapped his hand on Basil's shoulder and went on into his room.

It was a large family dinner party, and under cover of the conversation Basil kept an attentive eye on Jobena, trying to determine her desperate intention from her clothes and the expression of her face. She was adept at concealing her real emotions, as he had discovered this morning, but once or twice he saw her eyes wander to her watch and a look of abstraction come into them.

There was coffee afterward in the library, and, it seemed to Basil, interminable chatter. When Jobena arose suddenly and left the room, he moved just as quickly to Mr. Dorsey's side.

"Well, young man, what can I do for you?"

"Why—" Basil hesitated.

"Now is the time to ask me— when I'm well fed and happy."

"Why—" Again Basil stopped.

"Don't be shy. It's something about my Jobena."

But a peculiar thing had happened to Basil. In sudden detachment he saw himself from the outside— saw himself sneaking to Mr. Dorsey, in a house in which he was a guest, to inform against a girl.

"Why—" he repeated blankly.

"The question is: Can you support her?" said Mr. Dorsey jovially. "And the second is: Can you control her?"

"I forgot what it was I wanted to say," Basil blurted out.

He hurried from the library, his brain in a turmoil. Dashing upstairs, he knocked at the door of Jobena's room. There was no answer and he opened the door and glanced inside. The room was empty, but a half-packed suitcase lay on the bed.

"Jobena," he called anxiously. There was no answer. A maid passing along the hall told him Miss Jobena was having a marcel wave in her mother's room.

He hurried downstairs and into his hat and coat, racking his brains for the address where they had dropped Skiddy De Vinci the other afternoon. Sure that he would recognize the building, he drove down Lexington Avenue in a taxi, tried three doors, and trembled with excitement as he found the name "Leonard Edward Davies De Vinci" on a card beside a bell. When he rang, a latch clicked on an inner door.

He had no plan. Failing argument, he had a vague melodramatic idea of knocking him down, tying him up and letting him lie there until it blew over. In view of the fact that Skiddy outweighed him by forty pounds, this was a large order.

Skiddy was packing— the overcoat he tossed hastily over his suitcase did not serve to hide this fact from Basil. There was an open bottle of whisky on his littered dresser, and beside it a half-full glass.

Concealing his surprise, he invited Basil to sit down.

"I had to come and see you"— Basil tried to make his voice calm— "about Jobena."

"Jobena?" Skiddy frowned. "What about her? Did she send you here?"

"Oh, no." Basil swallowed hard, stalling for time. "I thought— maybe you could advise me— you see, I don't think she likes me, and I don't know why."

Skiddy's face relaxed. "That's nonsense. Of course she likes you. Have a drink?"

"No. At least not now."

Skiddy finished his glass. After a slight hesitation he removed his overcoat from the suitcase.

"Excuse me if I go on packing, will you? I'm going out of town."

"Certainly."

"Better have a drink."

"No, I'm on the water wagon— just now."

"When you get worrying about nothing, the thing to do is to have a drink."

The phone rang and he answered it, squeezing the receiver close to his ear:

"Yes.... I can't talk now.... Yes.... At half-past five then. It's now about four.... I'll explain why when I see you.... Good-by." He hung up. "My office," he said with affected nonchalance... "Won't you have a little drink?"

"No, thanks."

"Never worry. Enjoy yourself."

"It's hard to be visiting in a house and know somebody doesn't like you."

"But she does like you. Told me so herself the other day."

While Skiddy packed they discussed the question. He was a little hazy and extremely nervous, and a single question asked in the proper serious tone would send him rambling along indefinitely. As yet Basil had evolved no plan save to stay with Skiddy and wait for the best opportunity of coming into the open.

But staying with Skiddy was going to be difficult; he was becoming worried at Basil's tenacity. Finally he closed his suitcase with one of those definite snaps, took down a large drink quickly and said:

"Well, guess I ought to get started."

They went out together and Skiddy hailed a taxi.

"Which way are you going?" Basil asked.

"Uptown— I mean downtown."

"I'll ride with you," volunteered Basil. "We might— we might have a drink in the— Biltmore."

Skiddy hesitated. "I'll drop you there," he said.

When they reached the Biltmore, Basil made no move to get out.

"You're coming in with me, aren't you?" he asked in a surprised voice.

Frowning, Skiddy looked at his watch. "I haven't got much time."

Basil's face fell; he sat back in the car.

"Well, there's no use my going in alone, because I look sort of young and they wouldn't give me anything unless I was with an older man."

The appeal succeeded. Skiddy got out, saying, "I'll have to hurry," and they went into the bar.

"What'll it be?"

"Something strong," Basil said, lighting his first cigarette in a month.

"Two stingers," ordered Skiddy.

"Let's have something really strong."

"Two double stingers then."

Out of the corner of his eye Basil looked at the clock. It was twenty after five. Waiting until Skiddy was in the act of taking down his drink he signalled to the waiter to repeat the order.

"Oh, no!" cried Skiddy.

"You'll have to have one on me."

"You haven't touched yours."

Basil sipped his drink, hating it. He saw that with the new alcohol Skiddy had relaxed a little.

"Got to be going," he said automatically. "Important engagement."

Basil had an inspiration.

"I'm thinking of buying a dog," he announced.

"Don't talk about dogs," said Skiddy mournfully. "I had an awful experience about a dog. I've just got over it."

"Tell me about it."

"I don't even like to talk about it; it was awful."

"I think a dog is the best friend a man has," Basil said.

"Do you?" Skiddy slapped the table emphatically with his open hand. "So do I, Lee. So do I."

"Nobody ever loves him like a dog," went on Basil, staring off sentimentally into the distance.

The second round of double stingers arrived.

"Let me tell you about my dog that I lost," said Skiddy. He looked at his watch. "I'm late, but a minute won't make any difference, if you like dogs."

"I like them better than anything in the world." Basil raised his first glass, still half full. "Here's to man's best friend— a dog."

They drank. There were tears in Skiddy's eyes.

"Let me tell you. I raised this dog Eggshell from a pup. He was a beauty— an Airedale, sired by McTavish VI."

"I bet he was a beauty."

"He was! Let me tell you—"

As Skiddy warmed to his subject, Basil pushed his new drink toward Skiddy, whose hand presently closed upon the stem. Catching the bartender's attention, he ordered two more. The clock stood at five minutes of six.

Skiddy rambled on. Ever afterward the sight of a dog story in a magazine caused Basil an attack of acute nausea. At half-past six Skiddy rose uncertainly.

"I've gotta go. Got important date. Be mad."

"All right. We'll stop by the bar and have one more."

The bartender knew Skiddy and they talked for a few minutes, for time seemed of no account now. Skiddy had a drink with his old friend to wish him luck on a very important occasion. Then he had another.

At a quarter before eight o'clock Basil piloted Leonard Edward Davies De Vinci from the hotel bar, leaving his suitcase in care of the bartender.

"Important engagement," Skiddy mumbled as they hailed a taxi.

"Very important," Basil agreed. "I'm going to see that you get there."

When the car rolled up, Skiddy tumbled in and Basil gave the address to the driver.

"Good-by and thanks!" Skiddy called fervently. "Ought to go in, maybe, and drink once more to best friend man ever had."

"Oh, no," said Basil, "it's too important."

"You're right. It's too important."

The car rolled off and Basil followed it with his eye as it turned the corner. Skiddy was going out on Long Island to visit Eggshell's grave.

iv

BASIL HAD never had a drink before and, now with his jubilant relief, the three cocktails that he had been forced to down mounted swiftly to his head. On his way to the Dorseys' house he threw back his head and roared with laughter.

The self-respect he had lost last night rushed back to him; he felt himself tingling with the confidence of power.

As the maid opened the door for him he was aware subconsciously that there was someone in the lower hall. He waited till the maid disappeared; then stepping to the door of the coat room, he pulled it open. Beside her suitcase stood Jobena, wearing a look of mingled impatience and fright. Was he deceived by his ebullience or, when she saw him, did her face lighten with relief?

"Hello." She took off her coat and hung it up as if that was her purpose there, and came out under the lights. Her face, pale and lovely, composed itself, as if she had sat down and folded her hands.

"George was looking for you," she said indifferently.

"Was he? I've been with a friend."

With an expression of surprise she sniffed the faint aroma of cocktails.

"But my friend went to visit his dog's tomb, so I came home."

She stiffened suddenly. "You've been with Skiddy?"

"He was telling me about his dog," said Basil gravely. "A man's best friend is his dog after all."

She sat down and stared at him, wide-eyed.

"Has Skiddy passed out?"

"He went to see a dog."

"Oh, the fool!" she cried.

"Were you expecting him? Is it possible that that's your suitcase?"

"It's none of your business."

Basil took it out of the closet and deposited it in the elevator.

"You won't need it tonight," he said.

Her eyes shone with big despairing tears.

"You oughtn't to drink," she said brokenly. "Can't you see what it's made of him?"

"A man's best friend is a stinger."

"You're just sixteen. I suppose all that you told me the other afternoon was a joke— I mean, about the perfect life."

"All a joke," he agreed.

"I thought you meant it. Doesn't anybody ever mean anything?"

"I like you better than any girl I ever knew," Basil said quietly. "I mean that."

"I liked you, too, until you said that about my kissing people."

He went and stood over her and took her hand.

"Let's take the bag upstairs before the maid comes in."

They stepped into the dark elevator and closed the door.

"There's a light switch somewhere," she said.

Still holding her hand, he drew her close and tightened his arm around her in the darkness. "Just for this once we don't need the light."

Going back on the train, George Dorsey came to a sudden resolution. His mouth tightened.

"I don't want to say anything, Basil—" He hesitated. "But look— Did you have something to drink Thanksgiving Day?"

Basil frowned and nodded.

"Sometimes I've got to," he said soberly. "I don't know what it is. All my family died of liquor."

"Gee!" exclaimed George.

"But I'm through. I promised Jobena I wouldn't touch anything more till I'm twenty-one. She feels that if I go on with this constant dissipation it'll ruin my life."

George was silent for a moment.

"What were you and she talking about those last few days? Gosh, I thought you were supposed to be visiting me. "

"It's— it's sort of sacred," Basil said placidly.... "Look here; if we don't have anything fit to eat for dinner, let's get Sam to leave the pantry window unlocked tonight."

20: The Old Doll's House

Damon Runyon

1880-1946

Collier's, 13 May 1933

Collected in: *More Than Somewhat* 1937

NOW IT seems that one cold winter night, a party of residents of Brooklyn comes across the Manhattan Bridge in an automobile wishing to pay a call on a guy by the name of Lance McGowan, who is well known to one and all along Broadway as a coming guy in the business world.

In fact, it is generally conceded that, barring accident, Lance will someday be one of the biggest guys in this country as an importer, and especially as an importer of such merchandise as fine liquors, because he is very bright, and has many good connections throughout the United States and Canada.

Furthermore, Lance McGowan is a nice-looking young guy and he has plenty of ticker, although some citizens say he does not show very sound business judgment in trying to move in on Angie the Ox over in Brooklyn, as Angie the Ox is an importer himself, besides enjoying a splendid trade in other lines, including artichokes and extortion.

Of course Lance McGowan is not interested in artichokes at all, and very little in extortion, but he does not see any reason why he shall not place his imports in a thriving territory such as Brooklyn, especially as his line of merchandise is much superior to anything handled by Angie the Ox.

Anyway, Angie is one of the residents of Brooklyn in the party that wishes to call on Lance McGowan, and besides Angie the party includes a guy by the name of Mockie Max, who is a very prominent character in Brooklyn, and another guy by the name of The Louse Kid, who is not so prominent, but who is considered a very promising young guy in many respects, although personally I think The Louse Kid has a very weak face.

He is supposed to be a wonderful hand with a burlap bag when anybody wishes to put somebody in such a bag, which is considered a great practical joke in Brooklyn, and in fact The Louse Kid has a burlap bag with him on the night in question, and they are figuring on putting Lance McGowan in the bag when they call on him, just for the laugh. Personally, I consider this a very crude form of humour, but then Angie the Ox and the other members of his party are very crude characters, anyway.

Well, it seems they have Lance McGowan pretty well cased, and they know that of an evening along toward ten o'clock he nearly always strolls through West Fifty-fourth street on his way to a certain spot on Park Avenue that is called the Humming Bird Club, which has a very high-toned clientele, and the

reason Lance goes there is because he has a piece of the joint, and furthermore he loves to show off his shape in a tuxedo to the swell dolls.

So these residents of Brooklyn drive in their automobile along this route, and as they roll past Lance McGowan, Angie the Ox and Moekie Max let fly at Lance with a couple of sawed-offs, while The Louse Kid holds the burlap bag, figuring for all I know that Lance will be startled by the sawed-offs and will hop into the bag like a rabbit.

But Lance is by no means a sucker, and when the first blast of slugs from the sawed-offs breezes past him without hitting him, what does he do but hop over a brick wall alongside him and drop into a yard on the other side. So Angie the Ox, and Mockie Max and The Louse Kid get out of their automobile and run up close to the wall themselves because they commence figuring that if Lance McGowan starts popping at them from behind this wall, they will be taking plenty the worst of it, for of course they cannot figure Lance to be strolling about without being rodded up somewhat.

But Lance is by no means rodded up, because a rod is apt to create a bump in his shape when he has his tuxedo on, so the story really begins with Lance McGowan behind the brick wall, practically defenceless, and the reason I know this story is because Lance McGowan tells most of it to me, as Lance knows that I know his real name is Lancelot, and he feels under great obligation to me because I never mention the matter publicly.

Now, the brick wall Lance hops over is a wall around a pretty fair-sized yard, and the yard belongs to an old two-story stone house, and this house is well known to one and all in this man's town as a house of great mystery, and it is pointed out as such by the drivers of sightseeing buses.

This house belongs to an old doll by the name of Miss Abigail Ardsley, and anybody who ever reads the newspapers will tell you that Miss Abigail Ardsley has so many potatoes that it is really painful to think of, especially to people who have no potatoes whatever. In fact, Miss Abigail Ardsley has practically all the potatoes in the world, except maybe a few left over for general circulation.

These potatoes are left to her by her papa, old Waldo Ardsley, who accumulates same in the early days of this town by buying corner real estate very cheap before people realize this real estate will be quite valuable later on for fruit-juice stands and cigar stores.

It seems that Waldo is a most eccentric old bloke, and is very strict with his daughter, and will never let her marry, or even as much as look as if she wishes to marry, until finally she is so old she does not care a cuss about marrying, or anything else, and becomes very eccentric herself.

In fact, Miss Abigail Ardsley becomes so eccentric that she cuts herself off from everybody, and especially from a lot of relatives who are wishing to live off her, and any time anybody cuts themselves off from such characters they are

considered very eccentric, indeed, especially by the relatives. She lives in the big house all alone, except for a couple of old servants, and it is very seldom that anybody sees her around and about, and many strange stories are told of her.

Well, no sooner is he in the yard than Lance McGowan begins looking for a way to get out, and one way he does not wish to get out is over the wall again, because he figures Angie the Ox and his sawed-offs are bound to be waiting for him in Fifty-fourth Street. So Lance looks around to see if there is some way out of the yard in another direction, but it seems there is no such way, and pretty soon he sees the snozzle of a sawed-off come poking over the wall, with the ugly kisser of Angie the Ox behind it, looking for him, and there is Lance McGowan all cornered up in the yard, and not feeling so good, at that.

Then Lance happens to try a door on one side of the house, and the door opens at once and Lance McGowan hastens in to find himself in the living-room of the house. It is a very large living-room with very nice furniture standing around and about, and oil paintings on the walls, and a big old grandfather's clock as high as the ceiling, and statuary here and there. In fact, it is such a nice, comfortable-looking room that Lance McGowan is greatly surprised, as he is expecting to find a regular mystery-house room such as you see in the movies, with cobwebs here and there, and everything all rotted up, and maybe Boris Karloff wandering about making strange noises.

But the only person in this room seems to be a little old doll all dressed in soft white, who is sitting in a low rocking-chair by an open fireplace in which a bright fire is going, doing some tatting.

Well, naturally Lance McGowan is somewhat startled by this scene, and he is figuring that the best thing he can do is to guzzle the old doll before she can commence yelling for the gendarmes, when she looks up at him and gives him a soft smile, and speaks to him in a soft voice, as follows:

'Good evening,' the old doll says.

Well, Lance cannot think of any reply to make to this at once, as it is certainly not a good evening for him, and he stands there looking at the old doll, somewhat dazed, when she smiles again and tells him to sit down.

So the next thing Lance knows, he is sitting there in a chair in front of the fireplace chewing the fat with the old doll as pleasant as you please, and of course the old doll is nobody but Miss Abigail Ardsley. Furthermore, she does not seem at all alarmed, or even much surprised, at seeing Lance in her house, but then Lance is never such a looking guy as is apt to scare old dolls, or young dolls either, especially when he is all slicked up.

Of course Lance knows who Miss Abigail Ardsley is, because he often reads stories in the newspapers about her the same as everybody else, and he always figures such a character must be slightly daffy to cut herself off from everybody

when she has all the potatoes in the world, and there is so much fun going on, but he is very courteous to her, because after all he is a guest in her home.

'You are young.' the old doll says to Lance McGowan, looking him in the kisser. 'It is many years since a young man comes through yonder door. 'Ah, yes: she says, 'so many years.'

And with this she lets out a big sigh, and looks so very sad that Lance McGowan's heart is touched. 'Forty-five years now,' the old doll says in a low voice, as if she is talking to herself. 'So young, so handsome, and so good.'

And although Lance is in no mood to listen to reminiscences at this time, the next thing he knows he is hearing a very pathetic love story, because it seems that Miss Abigail Ardsley is once all hotted up over a young guy who is nothing but a clerk in her papa's office.

It seems from what Lance McGowan gathers that there is nothing wrong with the young guy that a million bobs will not cure, but Miss Abigail Ardsley's papa is a mean old waffle, and he will never listen to her having any truck with a poor guy, so they dast not let him know how much they love each other.

But it seems that Miss Abigail Ardsley's ever-loving young guy has plenty of moxie, and every night he comes to see her after her papa goes to the hay, and she lets him in through the same side-door Lance McGowan comes through, and they sit by the fire and hold hands, and talk in low tones, and plan what they will do when the young guy makes a scratch.

Then one night it seems Miss Abigail Ardsley's papa has the stomach ache, or some such, and cannot sleep a wink, so he comes wandering downstairs looking for the Jamaica ginger, and catches Miss Abigail Ardsley and her ever-loving guy in a clutch that will win the tide for any wrestler that can ever learn it.

Well, this scene is so repulsive to Miss Abigail Ardsley's papa that he is practically speechless for a minute, and then he orders the young guy out of his life in every respect, and tells him never to darken his door again, especially the side-door. But it seems that by this time a great storm is raging outside, and Miss Abigail Ardsley begs and pleads with her papa to let the young guy at least remain until the storm subsides, but between being all sored up at the clutching scene he witnesses, and his stomach ache, Mr. Ardsley is very hard-hearted, indeed, and he makes the young guy take the wind.

The next morning the poor young guy is found at the side-door frozen as stiff as a board, because it seems that the storm that is raging is the blizzard of 1888, which is a very famous event in the history of New York, although up to this time Lance McGowan never hears of it before, and does not believe it until he looks the matter up afterwards. It seems from what Miss Abigail Ardsley says that as near as anyone can make out, the young guy must return to the door seeking shelter after wandering about in the storm a while, but of course by this time her papa has the door all bolted up, and nobody hears the young guy.

'And,' Miss Abigail Ardsley says to Lance McGowan, after giving him all these details, 'I never speak to my papa again as long as he lives, and no other man ever comes in or out of yonder door, or any other door of this house, until your appearance to-night, although,' she says, 'this side-door is never locked in case such a young man comes seeking shelter.'

Then she looks at Lance McGowan in such a way that he wonders if Miss Abigail Ardsley hears the sawed-offs going when Angie the Ox and Mockie Max are tossing slugs at him, but he is too polite to ask.

Well, all these old-time memories seem to make Miss Abigail Ardsley feel very tough, and by and by she starts to weep, and if there is one thing Lance McGowan cannot stand it is a doll weeping, even if she is nothing but an old doll. So he starts in to cheer Miss Abigail Ardsley up, and he pats her on the arm, and says to her like this:

'Why,' Lance says, 'I am greatly surprised to hear your statement about the doors around here being so little used. Why, Sweetheart,' Lance says, 'if I know there is a doll as good-looking as you in the neighbourhood, and a door unlocked, I will be busting in myself every night. Come, come, come,' Lance says, 'let us talk things over and maybe have a few laughs, because I may have to stick around here a while. Listen, Sweetheart,' he says, 'do you happen to have a drink in the joint?'

Well, at this Miss Abigail Ardsley dries her eyes, and smiles again, and then she pulls a sort of rope near her, and in comes a guy who seems about ninety years old, and who seems greatly surprised to see Lance there. In fact, he is so surprised that he is practically tottering when he leaves the room after hearing Miss Abigail Ardsley tell him to bring some wine and sandwiches.

And the wine he brings is such wine that Lance McGowan has half a mind to send some of the lads around afterwards to see if there is any more of it in the joint, especially when he thinks of the unlocked side-door, because he can sell this kind of wine by the carat.

Well, Lance sits there with Miss Abigail Ardsley sipping wine and eating sandwiches, and all the time he is telling her stories of one kind and another, some of which he cleans up a little when he figures they may be a little too snappy for her, and by and by he has her laughing quite heartily indeed.

Finally he figures there is no chance of Angie and his sawed-offs being outside waiting for him, so he says he guesses he will be going, and Miss Abigail Ardsley personally sees him to the door, and this time it is the front door, and as Lance is leaving he thinks of something he once sees a guy do on the stage, and he takes Miss Abigail Ardsley's hand and raises it to his lips and gives it a large kiss, all of which is very surprising to Miss Abigail Ardsley, but more so to Lance McGowan when he gets to thinking about it afterwards.

Just as he figures, there is no one in sight when he gets out in the street, so he goes on over to the Humming Bird Club, where he learns that many citizens are greatly disturbed by his absence, and are wondering if he is in The Louse Kid's burlap bag, for by this time it is pretty well known that Angie the Ox and his fellow citizens of Brooklyn are around and about.

In fact, somebody tells Lance that Angie is at the moment over in Good Time Charley's little speak in West Forty-ninth Street, buying drinks for one and all, and telling how he makes Lance McGowan hop a brick wall, which of course sounds most disparaging of Lance.

Well, while Angie is still buying these drinks, and still speaking of making Lance a brick-wall hopper, all of a sudden the door of Good Time Charley's speak opens and in comes a guy with a Betsy in his hand and this guy throws four slugs into Angie the Ox before anybody can say hello.

Furthermore, the guy throws one slug into Mockie Max, and one slug into The Louse Kid, who are still with Angie the Ox, so the next thing anybody knows there is Angie as dead as a door-nail, and there is Moekie Max even deader than Angie, and there is The Louse making a terrible fuss over a slug in his leg, and nobody can remember what the guy who plugs them looks like, except a couple of stool pigeons who state that the guy looks very much like Lance McGowan.

So what happens but early the next morning Johnny Brannigan, the plain-clothes copper, puts the arm on Lance McGowan for plugging Angie the Ox, and Mockie Max and The Louse Kid, and there is great rejoicing in copper circles generally because at this time the newspapers are weighing in the sacks on the coppers quite some, claiming there is too much lawlessness going on around and about and asking why somebody is not arrested for something.

So the collar of Lance McGowan is water on the wheel of one and all because Lance is so prominent, and anybody will tell you that it looks as if it is a sure thing that Lance will be very severely punished, and maybe sent to the electric chair, although he hires Judge Goldstein, who is one of the surest-footed lawyers in this town, to defend him. But even Judge Goldstein admits that Lance is in a tough spot, especially as the newspapers are demanding justice, and printing long stories about Lance, and pictures of him, and calling him some very uncouth names.

Finally Lance himself commences to worry about his predicament, although up to this time a little thing like being charged with murder in the first degree never bothers Lance very much. And in fact he will not be bothering very much about this particular charge if he does not find the D. A. very fussy about letting him out on bail. In fact, it is nearly two weeks before he lets Lance out on bail, and all this time Lance is in the sneezer, which is a most mortifying situation to a guy as sensitive as Lance.

Well, by the time Lance's trial comes up, you can get 3 to 1 anywhere that he will be convicted, and the price goes up to 5 when the prosecution gets through with its case, and proves by the stool pigeons that at exactly twelve o'clock on the night of January 5th, Lance McGowan steps into Good Time Charley's little speak and plugs Angie the Ox, Mockie Max and The Louse Kid.

Furthermore, several other witnesses who claim they know Lance McGowan by sight testify that they see Lance in the neighbourhood of Good Time Charley's around twelve o'clock, so by the time it comes Judge Goldstein's turn to put on the defence, many citizens are saying that if he can do no more than beat the chair for Lance he will be doing a wonderful job.

Well, it is late in the afternoon when Judge Goldstein gets up and looks all around the courtroom, and without making any opening statement to the jury for the defence, as these mouthpieces usually do, he says like this:

'Call Miss Abigail Ardsley,' he says.

At first nobody quite realizes just who Judge Goldstein is calling for, although the name sounds familiar to one and all present who read the newspapers, when in comes a little old doll in a black silk dress that almost reaches the floor, and a black bonnet that makes a sort of a frame for her white hair and face.

Afterwards I read in one of the newspapers that she looks like she steps down out of an old-fashioned ivory miniature and that she is practically beautiful, but of course Miss Abigail Ardsley has so many potatoes that no newspaper dast to say she looks like an old chromo.

Anyway, she comes into the courtroom surrounded by so many old guys you will think it must be recess at the Old Men's Home, except they are all dressed up in claw-hammer coat tails, and high collars, and afterwards it turns out that they are the biggest lawyers in this town, and they all represent Miss Abigail Ardsley one way or another, and they are present to see that her interests are protected, especially from each other.

Nobody ever sees so much bowing and scraping before in a courtroom. In fact, even the judge bows, and although I am only a spectator I find myself bowing too, because the way I look at it, anybody with as many potatoes as Miss Abigail Ardsley is entitled to a general bowing. When she takes the witness-stand, her lawyers grab chairs and move up as close to her as possible, and in the street outside there is practically a riot as word goes around that Miss Abigail Ardsley is in the court, and citizens come running from every which way, hoping to get a peek at the richest old doll in the world.

Well, when all hands finally get settled down a little, Judge Goldstein speaks to Miss Abigail Ardsley as follows:

'Miss Ardsley,' he says, 'I am going to ask you just two or three questions. Kindly look at this defendant,' Judge Goldstein says, pointing at Lance McGowan, and giving Lance the office to stand up. 'Do you recognize him?'

Well, the little old doll takes a gander at Lance, and nods her head yes, and Lance gives her a large smile, and Judge Goldstein says:

'Is he a caller in your home on the night of January fifth?' Judge Goldstein asks.

'He is,' Miss Abigail Ardsley says.

'Is there a clock in the living-room in which you receive this defendant?' Judge Goldstein says.

'There is,' Miss Abigail Ardsley says. 'A large clock,' she says. 'A grandfather's clock.'

'Do you happen to notice,' Judge Goldstein says, 'and do you now recall the hour indicated by this clock when the defendant leaves your home?'

'Yes,' Miss Abigail Ardsley says, 'I do happen to notice. It is just twelve o'clock by my clock,' she says. 'Exactly twelve o'clock,' she says.

Well, this statement creates a large sensation in the courtroom, because if it is twelve o'clock when Lance McGowan leaves Miss Abigail Ardsley's house in West Fifty-fourth Street, anybody can see that there is no way he can be in Good Time Charley's little speak over five blocks away at the same minute unless he is a magician, and the judge begins peeking over his specs at the coppers in the courtroom very severe, and the cops begin scowling at the stool pigeons, and I am willing to lay plenty of 6 to 5 that the stools will wish they are never born before they hear the last of this matter from the gendarmes.

Furthermore, the guys from the D. A.'s office who are handling the prosecution are looking much embarrassed, and the jurors are muttering to each other, and right away Judge Goldstein says he moves that the case against his client be dismissed, and the judge says he is in favour of the motion, and he also says he thinks it is high time the gendarmes in this town learn to be a little careful who they are arresting for murder, and the guys from the D. A.'s office do not seem to be able to think of anything whatever to say.

So there is Lance as free as anybody, and as he starts to leave the courtroom he stops by Miss Abigail Ardsley, who is still sitting in the witness-chair surrounded by her mouthpieces, and he shakes her hand and thanks her, and while I do not hear it myself, somebody tells me afterwards that Miss Abigail Ardsley says to Lance in a low voice, like this:

'I will be expecting you again some night, young man,' she says.

'Some night, Sweetheart,' Lance says, 'at twelve o'clock.'

And then he goes on about his business, and Miss Abigail Ardsley goes on about hers; and everybody says it is certainly a wonderful thing that a doll as rich as Miss Abigail Ardsley comes forward in the interests of justice to save a guy like Lance McGowan from a wrong rap.

But of course it is just as well for Lance that Miss Abigail Ardsley does not explain to the court that when she recovers from the shock of the finding of her

ever-loving young guy frozen to death, she stops all the clocks in her house at the hour she sees him last, so for forty-five years it is always twelve o'clock in her house.

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21: Ask Miss Mott

E. Phillips Oppenheim

1866-1946

Collier's Magazine, 9 Feb 1935

There are two versions of this story, substantially different. This is the first, Collier's Magazine*, version. When all the Miss Mott short stories were collected in* Ask Miss Mott and other stories*, 1936, Oppenheim revised this, the first Miss Mott Story, and renamed it "Burglars Must Dine".*

MISS MOTT looked up quickly at the sound of the knock at her office door. She had been engaged in the typical task of writing her advice to a young woman whose courtship affairs had become involved, and she had rather forgotten the flight of time. Her typist had gone, her messenger boy, and the lame but very pleasant young clerk who assisted in her various activities. In other words, Miss Mott was alone on the top floor of a building not far removed from the Adelphi and, the hour being long past office hours, she was not expecting a caller.

"Come in," she invited curiously.

From that moment onward, strange things happened. First of all, the door was opened. Then a man, crouching so that his face was hidden, slipped in and, moving to the switch, turned out the light.

"What do you want?" Miss Mott demanded, alarm in her tone.

There was no immediate reply, nor, for some reason or other, did Miss Mott expect one. Congratulating herself upon her presence of mind, she pulled the table telephone instrument toward her, and lifted the receiver. There was no answera curious deadness, in fact, at the other end of the line. She peered forward through the gloom and, although the sensation was unusual with her, she began to be afraid. Her visitor had donned a mask of some light color. He had now locked the door, put the key in his pocket, and was leaning back in the easy-chair which she kept for the more distinguished of her clients.

"I shouldn't worry about that, if I were you," he suggested, with a wave of his hand toward the telephone. "I've cut the telephone cord."

"Then you were guilty of a very impertinent action," Miss Mott declared with spirit. "Who are you, and what on earth can you want with me?"

"Keep calm, I beg of you," he enjoined. "Do you suppose that I should be likely to mount all these stairs, and pay you a visit at this inconvenient hour of the evening without wanting something? If you wait for a few moments in patience, you will certainly hear what it is."

"Wait for a few more moments," Miss Mott lied courageously, "and my secre tary and clerk will both be back."

He laughed derisively, but not unpleasantly.

"My dear young lady," he pointed out, "since when have your secretary, and your messenger boy, and your director of intelligence, as I suppose you call the lame youth, returned at something after eight o'clock, when you have once dismissed them? They have all three left for the night. You are here, utterly alone, busily engaged in completing your column for 'Home Talks.' In other words, you are delving into other people's troubles, and answering the long string of queries which you invite every week under the heading of 'Ask Miss Mott'."

"You seem to know a great deal about my business," she remarked icily.

"Only," he assured her, "since you began to interfere in mine."

SHE liked his voice, and she was not in the least alarmed now, but she realized to the full the unusualness of the situation.

"Perhaps you will tell me," she invited, "when I had the misfortune to interfere in your affairs."

"I am coming to that," he promised her.

"Couldn't we have the light on?" she begged. "I don't like sitting in the darkness with a stranger on the seventh floor of a deserted building."

"Compromising, my dear Miss Mott, I admit," the voice from the shadows acknowledged, "but necessary. I am a very shy person, as most criminals are. My mask may disguise my features, but I cannot afford to give you the opportunity of taking note of other details of my person."

"You are sure that you are a criminal?" she ventured.

"Absolutely certain," he assured her. "Really, I should be a godsend to you. Not only am I a criminal, but I am a member of a gang which is very seriously looked upon by the police. If you were in the fortunate position of being able to deliver me up to justice, I have no doubt that you might commence your career auspiciously by touching several rashly offered rewards."

"Then, if that is really your position, why are you here?" she demanded. "I have nothing worth stealing, and I imagine a nicely brought-up criminal doesn't go about frightening young women, unless there's something to he gained by it."

"Very well put, Miss Mott," he answered. "I will tell you why I am here. It is to stop your interference in my legitimate business."

"But how can I have interfered with your business," she argued, "when I don't know what it is? And, furthermore," she went on, "if you have a business, how can you be a criminal?"

"My dear young lady." he remonstrated, "my business is crime."

"Then what is your business with me?" she asked him point-blank.

He settled himself down more comfortably in his chair.

"I will explain," he promised. "You have, I understand, for several years. conducted an extraordinarily successful column in a paper called 'Home Talks.' You give advice, chiefly of course, to members of your own sex, who are in difficulties with their lovers, husbands, cookery or wardrobes. Excellent, so long as you stick to that. Lately, however, encouraged by certain minor successes, you have gone farther afield. You have placed yourself privately at the disposal of your clients who find themselves in any sort of difficulty whatsoever. In pursuit of your vocation, you have engaged a small staff, and you now call yourself, I think, an 'Intelligence Agent'."

"That seems to me a very reasonable definition of my activities," Miss Mott admitted coldly.

"I will not quarrel with it," he agreed. "You must permit me to point out, however, that you fly a little too high when you interfere in the enterprises of anyone so well known in the criminal world as your humble visitor."

"Who are you then?" she inquired.

"I have many aliases," he confided. "The one under which you would know me best, perhaps— but, wait a moment."

HE ROSE to his feet. and moved toward her. She was conscious of a sudden shiver, which, if it were not of fear, was certainly of some kindred excitement. Her pulses were stirred. She felt her heart beating more quickly. He made no attempt to come round to her side of the desk, however. He leaned over it, his eyes, through the slits in his mask, taking swift and appreciative note of her. She caught a gleam of something white in his hand, and was at once aware of a waft of delicate perfume.

"Violet Joe!" she exclaimed. "You are the man who is blackmailing—"

"Hush," he interrupted. "One of the first lessons of our profession— yours and mine, I mean— which must be learned and adhered to is 'no names.' I have a great many more serious crimes charged against me than the present one, but you may take it that it was from my agent that your messenger procured that little packet of letters yesterday afternoon at the Black Boy Inn at Cobham. I must congratulate you upon the idea. It was indeed a very cleverly thought-out piece of work, and I can assure you that it goes very much against the grain with me to insist upon having them hack again."

"So that is what you have come for!" she exclaimed.

"That what I have come for."

Miss Mott was not feeling quite so comfortable. She had an uncle in Scotland Yard who was fond of telling her atories about thc famous criminals of the day, and she had heard some very ugly tales indeed about the gang with which Violet Joe was oonnected. She dimly remembered that a reward of a thousand pounds had been placed unon the head of the leader of thc gang.

"How do you know that I have not already parted with those letters?" she asked.

"Because," he answered. "— shall I be indiscrete for once and mention names?— Mrs. Bland Potterson comes back from Brighton tonight, and she is almost certain to have asked you to deliver them into her own hand. That might almost be one reason why you are working late here. In any case, the letters are in that drawer on your right-hand side, and I am afraid that I must ask you to hand them over to me."

It was a very exciting moment for Miss Mott. How she longed to see behind that mysterious mask of light silk! The eyes and the voice had both their separate thrill, but, more than anything else in the world, she wanted at that moment to look into the face of Violet Joe.

"SUPPOSING I refuse?" she suggested.

"That seems such a foolish supposition," he argued, a touch of weariness inhis tone— "You are not a large person, Miss Mott. And you have heard a few things ahout Violet Joe, I dare say?"

"I have indeed," she acknowledged.

"Not all to my detriment, I hope?" he inquired anxiously.

"Mostly negative," she confided, sitting upright in her place. "I have heard that you absolutely decline to carry firearms in any of your enterprises, that you can break a man's wrist with your hands, that you are amateur boxer, a famous wrestler, and all those stupid things. They are part of the equipment of your profession, I suppose."

"Slightly withering," he commented.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"One wonders," she went on, "why a man so well equipod as you to fight for what he wants should stoop to the lower branches of crime— perhaps I should say thc Iowest branch of all— blackmailing."

"Ah, but my dear Miss Mott," he expostulated, "you do not know Mrs. Bland Potterson. You have probably never met Mr. Bland Potterson. I can assure you that if you had made their acquaintance you would understand the joy— the positive extasy— of having them both shivering in their shoes."

"I don't know either of them," Miss Mott acknowledged, "but I don't see what that has Lo do with it. In any case, I have the letters, and I am going to carry out my contract. I am not in the least afraid of you. Besides—"

"Well?"

"There is just one thing more that I have heard said of Violet Joe. He has never robbed or laid his hands upon a woman."

"Right," he admitted. "My problem then will be how to get the letters without using force— that is if I am to preserve my reputation."

"WELL, you're not going to get them," she assured him firmly, "and if you stay here much longer," she added with a sudden inspiration, "you will have my uncle to deal with."

"An who may he be?"

"Superintendent Detective Wragge of Scotland Yard," she answered, with a gleam of triumph in her eyes. "The name may be familiar to you—"

He laughed long and softly.

"Oh, Miss Mott," he expostulated. "I happen to know that your respected uncle is at Southampton to-night, the passenger list of the Devonia in his hand."

"You appear to be very well informed."

He leaned back as though to laugh again. Then Miss Mott had the shock of her young life, for she was young in years as well as in her career. Like a crouching cat through the darkness he was by her side with one spring. The drawer toward which her eyes had so frequently wandered was opened. His fingers had closed upon the letters. She struck out at him, and met only the empty air. She cried aloud, but that she knew was hopeless, for they were on the seventh floor of an almost empty building.

Violet Joe was back again in his chair on the other side of the desk, the packet of letters in his pocket. His eyes were smiling at her through the narrow apertures of his mask. A breath of the perfume of violets lingered in the air.

"Sorry, my dear young lady," he apologized, "but, after all. you mustn't complain. Flash bank notes, which I suppose you got from Scotland Yard. were quite a clever device of yours, but tricky— very tricky. You might have got my poor messenger into serious trouble, supposing he had been obliged to change one— say, for his bus fare on the way home. If you stoop to that sort of thing, you must expect this sort of retribution."

He rose swiftly and unexpectedly to his feet, and she saw his outline in the gloom, the head thrust forward, listening intently. Then he crossed the room, and felt about as though searching for something. He was by the window now, a little distance behind her desk, moving noiselessly— an almost invisible presence. Suddenly she became conscious of a familiar but at that hour unusual sound. She heard the elevator, the terminus of which was two flights down, as it came rattling into its place. A cold wave of air swept through the room. Violet Joe had opened the window.

"You are going to have a caller, Miss Mott" he confided.

She listened. They both listened. This time there was thc faint but distinct sound of shuffling footsteps mounting the last flight of steps.

"Dear me!" Violet Joe sighed, "I must go— by the fire escape!"

He was halfway out of the window now. He looked at her, and there was a quality of laughter in his voice, as he pulled the key of the door from his pocket, and let it drop onto the floor. Then he swung away out of sight.

Miss Mott walked to the window and closed it. Then she turned the light on, and unlocked the door.

THE knock at the door came at last, and Miss Mott's apprehensions were not lessened by the sight of the visitor who made furtivc entrance. He could not, by any means, be called prepossessing. He wore the clothes of the shabby genteel clerk out of work, but the clothes themselves were very much more shabby than genteel. His linen was doubtful, and it was obvious that he was wearing his tie inside out. His coat showed ink stains, but least pleasing of all was his face— long and narrow, with closeset eyes, and unpleasant mouth.

"Good evening, Miss," he said, as he slipped across the threshold.

"Good evening," Miss Mott answered coldly. "What do you want?"

The young man deliberately closed the door bchind him. Then he approached the desk at which Miss Mott was seated.

"First of all, I have a matter of business no discuss with you, Miss," he began. "You do the answers don't you, for ladies and girls what gets into trouble in 'Home Talks'?"

"I do," she acknowledged. "Are you one of my readers?"

Her visitor chuckled.

"Not much, Miss," he scoffed. "I ain't come here to waste your time, either, nor mine. You've set up what you call an 'Intelligence Agency' on your own. You had a job from Mrs. Bland Potterson of Portland Place. You got some letters back for her. She hasn't had them yet because she's only returning from Brighton tonight. I'm after those letters."

"Blackmailer Number Two," Miss Mott observed calmly.

"You can call me what you jolly well like," the young man replied. "It was one of the big five who pinched them first. You settled with his messenger, who was a pal of mine, at Cobham this afternoon, and you've got the letters waiting to give them back to Mrs. Bland Potterson."

"Well?"

"She'll have to pay twice over for them, that's all, because I've cut into the game," the intruder announced with a grin. "No use making a fuss, Miss," he added, unpleasantly. "Hand over the letters."

"You are unfortunately too late," Miss Mott told him. "A previous visitor— probably the gentleman to whom you refer as one of the big five— was here half an hour ago and, finding me alone and unarmed, has, in most chivalrous fashion, possessed himself of them."

The young man leaped forward and thrust his very disagreeable face within a few inches of Miss Mott's.

"You've got those letters," he snarled. "Tell me where they are!"

"I have told you I haven't got them," she reiterated. "I haven't got them, and if I had I wouldn't give them to you."

"I'll teach you, you little devil!" he muttered, and seized her by the shoulders.

She shrieked madly— shrieked and shrieked again. He only laughed.

There was a sound which, to her dazed ears, seemed like the smashing of of a thousand window panes. The carpet all over the further side of the office was littered with glass and broken wood-work. The man in the mask, his hands upon the sill, leaped into the room. He asked no questions. He came at Miss Mott's assailant like a wildcat. Miss Mott, opening her eyes from the horror which was encompassing her, heard a yell of agony, and saw her tormentor lying motionless in a far corner of the room. The smell of violets was in her nostrils, the fire of a pair of burning blue eyes blazed into hers. Nevertheless, the newcomers voice, when he spoke, was remarkably steady.

"Turn out the light," he directed. "I've cut my cheek and my hand, and I shall have to take my mask off. I do not wish you to see my face."

She moved over to the switch, and obeyed. The blood from his cheek was dripping onto the desk.

"You had better get out and go home," he told her. "Here are your letters. I only wanted them to punish those beastly people, and they're not worth all that fuss anyway. Get your hat."

"But you must let me bathe your cheek," she begged, stopping short.

"I have already told you," he said sternly, "that I will not allow you to see my face. I will leave this rubbish upon the stairs. He can tell his own story to anyone he pleases, when he recovers. Now go home."

MISS MOTT was very nearly cured that evening of any secret feeling of fondness she might have had for the women and girls whom she addressed every week in her column of "Home Talks" as "My dear friends." The butler at the great house in Portland Place gazed a little more haughtily than usual out of his front door at her timid summons. He rather resented visitors at this unusual hour.

"Mrs. Bland Potterson has just returned from Brighton, Miss. If you are the young lady whom she is expecting, I will take you to her. Otherwise the mistress is not at home."

Miss Mott gave her name, and was conducted through scenes of Tottenham Court Road magnificence into a glaring drawing-room, brilliantly illuminated.

"The young person whom you were expecting, madam," the man announced.

A rubicund lady, dressed in clothes which seemed all too short and too tight for her, nodded patronizingly, and pointed to a seat.

"So you're Miss Mott," she remarked, folding her hands in front of her. "Parkins, tell your master that Miss Mott is here."

"Very good, madam."

"I have brought your letters, Mrs. Potterson," she confided.

"How clever of you, my dear!" the lady exclaimed, leaning forward and positively grabbing them from Miss Mott's outstretched hands. "Well, now, I am glad I thought of writing to you. Bothered to death I was about those letters. You see, my 'usband's by way of being a public man— may have a knighthood next year— it might run to a baronetcy— and when you get into circles like that, you see, young woman, there must never be any scandal. Not a breath of it."

Into the room bustled Mr. Bland Potterson, and he was very much what one would have imagined the husband of Mrs. Bland Potterson to be like. He, too, was short. He was sleek. He was pompous.

"My 'usband," Mrs. Bland Potterson announced. "This is the young lady who's got back the letters, 'Erbert. She's brought them with her."

Mr. Bland Potterson smiled as amiably as he knew how. His cunning little eyes were devouring the packet.

"You see," Mrs. Bland Potterson explained, "they are all signed by the wretched girl's Christian name, which was Ellen. She was with us when we lived at Forest Hill, where we 'ad a much smaller establishmcnt. 'Ousemaid, she was, and a very bad one at that. Well, as the letters show, she got into trouble. The first thing the 'ussy does is to try to get to see my 'usband alone, He's too clever for that, and keeps out of 'er way. The impudent 'ussy then actually came to see mc, and an outrageous story she told. Out of the 'ouse I packed her pretty quick. My 'usband may have his weak moments— gentlemen do, it seems to me now, since the war— but not with servant girls."

Mr. Bland Potterson fingered his tie impressively.

"I should think not," he declared.

"What happened to her?" Miss Mott asked quietly, with a sudden inexplicable curiosity.

"She appeared to have no friends," Mrs. Bland Patterson confided, "They took her in at some sort of institution, I believe, to have her baby. Her last letter was written from there."

"And now?"

"She died," was the indifferent and yet somewhat shamefaced reply. "She was a vicious little cat even on her deathbed. She got the clergyman to write that last letter there for her. Spiteful little beast!"

"And the child?"

Mr. Bland Potterson jangled the keys in his pocket.

"Who the devil cares anything about the child?" he demanded, "They put her into the workhouse, I think. Best place, too. Anyway, like a couple of mugs we kept her letters— some of them to my wife, and some of them to me— and they were stolen by a servant. Now you know the whole of the story, Miss Mott, and the letters are going upon the fire within the next few minutes."

Mrs. Bland Potterson leaned over and opened a bag upon the table by her side, From amongst a sheaf of money she selected a five pound note, and showed it to her husband.

"Yes, yes, my dear," he agreed, with a wave of the hand, "We can afford it. Certainly."

Mrs Bland Potterson handed the fivepound note over to Miss Mott, and rang the bell.

"There you are, young lady," she announced, with ponderous grandiloquence. "Don't say a word, I beg of you. You're very welcome."

Miss Mott was feeling a little confused. She looked at the note, she looked at Mrs. Bland Potterson, she looked at the short, pompous figure of her husband, she looked at the butler, waiting to see her out, and gained at last some inspiration. She handed the note into his eager fingers.

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind getting me a taxi," she begged.

MISS MOTT, as shc crossed the pavement toward the waiting taxi, was very angry indeed. She was angry with herself, she was angry with the obsequious butler, she was more than ever angry with Mr. and Mrs. Bland Potterson. It seemed to her, however, that the climax had been reached when she flung herself back in the corner of the taxicab and became conscious that it was already occupied!

"Who are you?" she cried, leaning forward. "This is my taxicab."

"Then I cannot congratulate you upon your choice, Miss Mott," a voice answered. "It is a very poor vehicle."

Miss Mott gasped.

"What on earth are you doing in here?" she demanded.

"I followed you," her dimly seen companion confessed. "I wanted to see how you got on with Mr. and Mrs. Bland Potterson."

"Beastly people!" she exclaimed.

He laughed softly.

"I had an idea you would not be pleased," he said. "I have to ask you a delicate question, Miss Mott. Please do not refuse to answer me."

"Well?"

"How much did they give you?"

"Five pounds," she answered scornfully. "I gave it to the butler."

This time his laugh, although just as soft, was more prolonged.

"I told you what unpleasant people they were. I am going to call on them myself in a few minutes."

"What do you mean? What do you want with them?"

"That would take too long to tell just now," he answered. "We are, I gather, on our way back to your rooms."

"We are just there."

"Then, will you be so kind," he begged, "as to slip into an evening gown— black would suit you very well, I think, with your pretty hair and your perfect complexion. I should like to dine somewhere where the light is not too good nor the music too loud— say Ciro's Grill Room— in an hour. I want to tell you about Mr. and Mrs. Bland Potterson."

"I think," Miss Mott said deliberately, "that you are mad!"

"And I think," he rejoined, "that you are terribly attractive. In one hour's time, I shall be waiting for you in the hall."

"I shall not be there," Miss Mott declared positively.

"I shall hope fur the best," the man replied.

MR. and Mrs. Bland Patterson were still indulging in their orgy of complacent self-congratulation. The door was thrown open. The butler once more insinuated his bland presence.

"The Honorable Mr. Gervase Mallincourt," he announced.

Mr. and Mrs. Bland Potterson were surprised. The young man who was approaching them was without doubt a person of consequence. Mrs. Bland Potterson smiled in greeting.

"I must apologize for this intrusion," the newcomer said. "My only excuse is that I shall merely keep you a matter of two minutes."

"Something to do with the election, perhaps? Mr. Bland Potterson suggested. "Take a chair, Mr.— er— Mallincourt."

"Your surmise is correct," the visitor agreed. "It has something to do with the election."

He produced a packet of letters from his pocket, folded together and secured with a rubber band.

"A quarter of an hour ago," the young man went on, "you bought and have doubtless already destroyed a packet of letters written to you both by the domestic servant whom you, Mr. Bland Patterson, seduced. You imagined that you were destroying the originals. You were not. You were destroying copies which had heen palmed off upon a cheap blackmailer. The originals have been kept for a different purpose. Here they are. Ten thousand pounds would not buy

them, Mr. Bland Potterson. Your resignation from your candidacy of the Western Division of St. Pancras would and will."

Mrs. Bland Patterson collapsed in her chair. Her husband sat with his mouth openincapable of speech.

"Who are you?" Mr. Bland Potterson demanded at last.

"I am a patriot," the visitor replied. "I live for the sake of my country, and I conceive it very much against my country's interests that you, sir, should become a member of the British Parliament. Mr. Hulings Johnson is an infinitely better man. All my friends wish Mr. Hulings Johnson to be elected. As there will be no time to secure a new candidate it seems to me that he probably will be. The time is very short. I should recommend, sir, that you take to your bed tonight, send for your doctor, announce your illness and communicate with your party organization."

The young gentleman who had introduced himself as the Honorable Gervase Mallincourt once more waved the letters in their faces and turned toward the door.

"If the announcement of your resignation, sir, appears in the newspapers tomorrow, upon my word as a gentleman the letters will be destroyed or returned to you— whichever you prefer. If it does not appear I shall be on the platform of your meeting at two o'clock in the afternoon. Do not trouble to ring, I can find my own way out."

"I CAME," Miss Mott said severely, "because I was curious."

"And you will remain," her companion replied, as they descended the stairs into the Grill Room, "beeause you are going to have a delightful dinner."

"What have you done to yourself?" she asked. "You look about twenty years older and, although you have been frightfully clever about it, I know that that is not your own hair, and those lines in your face are not natural."

"We criminals," he assured her, "get into the way of this sort of thing. You may yet see me as Father Christmas. How thankful I am," he went on, as they seated themselves in the bar and ordered cocktails, "that you are on the right side of the fence. You will never need to disguise yourself. On the whole I sm glad that you did not wear black— although I'm afraid that that was obstinacy— that particular shade of gray goes with your eyes. You are very distracting, Miss Mott—"

"I did not rome here to listen to you talking nonsense," she said severely,

"Of course not. I know that," he acknowledged. "Wait a minute. This has been a busy day. Let's drain these cocktails, then I will take you to the little corner table I have engaged. You shall read the menu of the dinner I have ordered and then, when I am quite sure that nothing would induce you to get up

and leave me until after the dinner has been served, I shall tell you what you are dying to hear."

MISS MOTT read the menu and gave a little sigh of content. She had a weakness for exquisite food.

"Nothing," she assured him, "would induce me to leave until after the strawberries!"

"Then here is the truth," her companion confessed. "Such matters do not come within the sphere of our activities as a rule, but I have a young cousin, brilliantly clever, who is aching to get into Parliament. Mr. Bland Potterson's withdrawal at the last moment will make the seat a certainty for him. How we got to know about the letters doesn't matter. We should never have done anything about them in an ordinary way— not in our line at all— but in a good cause, against a Bland Potterson, everything is admissible, The letters you got back were copies. I have just shown the originals to Mr. Bland Potterson, I think that he would have given me more than five pounds for them but I told him that there was only one price. That he will pay. Tomorrow night you will see the announcement of his sudden illness and retirement!"

Miss Mott's lips parted in a faint smile, There was a twinkle in her eyes as she watched the Amontillado being reverently poured into her consommi.

"Perhaps," she murmured, "after all, five pounds were as much as my copies were worth."

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22: The Door of the Trap

Sherwood Anderson

1876-1941

The Dial, May 1920

Collected in: *The Triumph of the Egg*, 1921

WINIFRED WALKER understood some things clearly enough. She understood that when a man is put behind iron bars he is in prison. Marriage was marriage to her.

It was that to her husband Hugh Walker, too, as he found out. Still he didn't understand. It might have been better had he understood, then he might at least have found himself. He didn't. After his marriage five or six years passed like shadows of wind blown trees playing on a wall. He was in a drugged, silent state. In the morning and evening every day he saw his wife. Occasionally something happened within him and he kissed her. Three children were born. He taught mathematics in the little college at Union Valley, Illinois, and waited.

For what— He began to ask himself that question. It came to him at first faintly like an echo. Then it became an insistent question. "I want answering," the question seemed to say. "Stop fooling along. Give your attention to me."

Hugh walked through the streets of the Illinois town. "Well, I'm married. I have children," he muttered.

He went home to his own house. He did not have to live within his income from the little college, and so the house was rather large and comfortably furnished. There was a negro woman who took care of the children and another who cooked and did the housework. One of the women was in the habit of crooning low soft negro songs. Sometimes Hugh stopped at the house door and listened. He could see through the glass in the door into the room where his family was gathered. Two children played with blocks on the floor. His wife sat sewing. The old negress sat in a rocking chair with his youngest child, a baby, in her arms. The whole room seemed under the spell of the crooning voice. Hugh fell under the spell. He waited in silence. The voice carried him far away somewhere, into forests, along the edges of swamps. There was nothing very definite about his thinking. He would have given a good deal to be able to be definite.

He went inside the house. "Well, here I am," his mind seemed to say, "here I am. This is my house, these are my children."

He looked at his wife Winifred. She had grown a little plump since their marriage. "Perhaps it is the mother in her coming out, she has had three children," he thought.

The crooning old negro woman went away, taking the youngest child with her. He and Winifred held a fragmentary conversation. "Have you been well to-day, dear—" she asked. "Yes," he answered.

If the two older children were intent on their play his chain of thought was not broken. His wife never broke it as the children did when they came running to pull and tear at him. Throughout the early evening, after the children went to bed, the surface of the shell of him was not broken at all. A brother college professor and his wife came in or he and Winifred went to a neighbor's house. There was talk. Even when he and Winifred were alone together in the house there was talk. "The shutters are becoming loose," she said. The house was an old one and had green shutters. They were continually coming loose and at night blew back and forth on their hinges making a loud banging noise.

Hugh made some remark. He said he would see a carpenter about the shutters. Then his mind began playing away, out of his wife's presence, out of the house, in another sphere. "I am a house and my shutters are loose," his mind said. He thought of himself as a living thing inside a shell, trying to break out. To avoid distracting conversation he got a book and pretended to read. When his wife had also begun to read he watched her closely, intently. Her nose was so and so and her eyes so and so. She had a little habit with her hands. When she became lost in the pages of a book the hand crept up to her cheek, touched it and then was put down again. Her hair was not in very good order. Since her marriage and the coming of the children she had not taken good care of her body. When she read her body slumped down in the chair. It became bag-like. She was one whose race had been run.

Hugh's mind played all about the figure of his wife but did not really approach the woman who sat before him. It was so with his children. Sometimes, just for a moment, they were living things to him, things as alive as his own body. Then for long periods they seemed to go far away like the crooning voice of the negress.

It was odd that the negress was always real enough. He felt an understanding existed between himself and the negress. She was outside his life. He could look at her as at a tree. Sometimes in the evening when she had been putting the children to bed in the upper part of the house and when he sat with a book in his hand pretending to read, the old black woman came softly through the room, going toward the kitchen. She did not look at Winifred, but at Hugh. He thought there was a strange, soft light in her old eyes. "I understand you, my son," her eyes seemed to say.

Hugh was determined to get his life cleaned up if he could manage it. "All right, then," he said, as though speaking to a third person in the room. He was quite sure there was a third person there and that the third person was within himself, inside his body. He addressed the third person.

"Well, there is this woman, this person I married, she has the air of something accomplished," he said, as though speaking aloud. Sometimes it almost seemed to him he had spoken aloud and he looked quickly and sharply at his wife. She continued reading, lost in her book. "That may be it," he went on. "She has had these children. They are accomplished facts to her. They came out of her body, not out of mine. Her body has done something. Now it rests. If she is becoming a little bag-like, that's all right."

He got up and making some trivial excuse got out of the room and out of the house. In his youth and young manhood the long periods of walking straight ahead through the country, that had come upon him like visitations of some recurring disease, had helped. Walking solved nothing. It only tired his body, but when his body was tired he could sleep. After many days of walking and sleeping something occurred. The reality of life was in some queer way re-established in his mind. Some little thing happened. A man walking in the road before him threw a stone at a dog that ran barking out of a farm-house. It was evening perhaps, and he walked in a country of low hills. Suddenly he came out upon the top of one of the hills. Before him the road dipped down into darkness but to the west, across fields, there was a farm-house. The sun had gone down, but a faint glow lit the western horizon. A. woman came out of the farmhouse and went toward a barn. He could not see her figure distinctly. She seemed to be carrying something, no doubt a milk pail; she was going to a barn to milk a cow.

The man in the road who had thrown the stone at the farm dog had turned and seen Hugh in the road behind him. He was a little ashamed of having been afraid of the dog. For a moment he seemed about to wait and speak to Hugh, and then was overcome with confusion and hurried away. He was a middle-aged man, but quite suddenly and unexpectedly he looked like a boy.

As for the farm woman, dimly seen going toward a distant barn, she also stopped and looked toward him. It was impossible she should have seen him. She was dressed in white and he could see her but dimly against the blackish green of the trees of an orchard behind her. Still she stood looking and seemed to look directly into his eyes. He had a queer sensation of her having been lifted by an unseen hand and brought to him. It seemed to him he knew all about her life, all about the life of the man who had thrown the stone at the dog.

In his youth, when life had stepped out of his grasp, Hugh had walked and walked until several such things had occurred and then suddenly he was all right again and could again work and live among men.

After his marriage and after such an evening at home he started walking rapidly as soon as he left the house. As quickly as possible he got out of town and struck out along a road that led over the rolling prairie. "Well, I can't walk for days and days as I did once," he thought. "There are certain facts in life and I must face facts. Winifred, my wife, is a fact, and my children are facts. I must get

my fingers on facts. I must live by them and with them. It's the way lives are lived."

Hugh got out of town and on to a road that ran between cornfields. He was an athletic looking man and wore loose fitting clothes. He went along distraught and puzzled. In a way he felt like a man capable of taking a man's place in life and in another way he didn't at all.

The country spread out, wide, in all directions. It was always night when he walked thus and he could not see, but the realization of distances was always with him. "Everything goes on and on but I stand still," he thought. He had been a professor in the little college for six years. Young men and women had come into a room and he had taught them. It was nothing. Words and figures had been played with. An effort had been made to arouse minds.

For what—

There was the old question, always coming back, always wanting answering as a little animal wants food. Hugh gave up trying to answer. He walked rapidly, trying to grow physically tired. He made his mind attend to little things in the effort to forget distances. One night he got out of the road and walked completely around a cornfield. He counted the stalks in each hill of corn and computed the number of stalks in a whole field. "It should yield twelve hundred bushels of corn, that field," he said to himself dumbly, as though it mattered to him. He pulled a little handful of cornsilk out of the top of an ear of corn and played with it. He tried to fashion himself a yellow moustache. "I'd be quite a fellow with a trim yellow moustache," he thought.

One day in his class-room Hugh suddenly began to look with new interest at his pupils. A young girl attracted his attention. She sat beside the son of a Union Valley merchant and the young man was writing something on the back of a book. She looked at it and then turned her head away. The young man waited.

It was winter and the merchant's son had asked the girl to go with him to a skating party. Hugh, however, did not know that. He felt suddenly old. When he asked the girl a question she was confused. Her voice trembled.

When the class was dismissed an amazing thing happened. He asked the merchant's son to stay for a moment and, when the two were alone together in the room, he grew suddenly and furiously angry. His voice was, however, cold and steady. "Young man," he said, "you do not come into this room to write on the back of a book and waste your time. If I see anything of the kind again I'll do something you don't expect. I'll throw you out through a window, that's what I'll do."

Hugh made a gesture and the young man went away, white and silent. Hugh felt miserable. For several days he thought about the girl who had quite accidentally attracted his attention. "I'll get acquainted with her. I'll find out about her," he thought.

It was not an unusual thing for professors in the college at Union Valley to take students home to their houses. Hugh decided he would take the girl to his home. He thought about it several days and late one afternoon saw her going down the college hill ahead of him.

The girl's name was Mary Cochran and she had come to the school but a few months before from a place called Huntersburg, Illinois, no doubt just such another place as Union Valley. He knew nothing of her except that her father was dead, her mother too, perhaps. He walked rapidly down the hill to overtake her. "Miss Cochran," he called, and was surprised to find that his voice trembled a little. "What am I so eager about—" he asked himself. A new life began in Hugh Walker's house. It was good for the man to have some one there who did not belong to him, and Winifred Walker and the children accepted the presence of the girl. Winifred urged her to come again. She did come several times a week.

To Mary Cochran it was comforting to be in the presence of a family of children. On winter afternoons she took Hugh's two sons and a sled and went to a small hill near the house. Shouts arose. Mary Cochran pulled the sled up the hill and the children followed. Then they all came tearing down together.

The girl, developing rapidly into womanhood, looked upon Hugh Walker as something that stood completely outside her own life. She and the man who had become suddenly and intensely interested in her had little to say to each other and Winifred seemed to have accepted her without question as an addition to the household. Often in the afternoon when the two negro women were busy she went away leaving the two older children in Mary's charge.

It was late afternoon and perhaps Hugh had walked home with Mary from the college. In the spring he worked in the neglected garden. It had been plowed and planted, but he took a hoe and rake and puttered about. The children played about the house with the college girl. Hugh did not look at them but at her. "She is one of the world of people with whom I live and with whom I am supposed to work here," he thought. "Unlike Winifred and these children she does not belong to me. I could go to her now, touch her fingers, look at her and then go away and never see her again."

That thought was a comfort to the distraught man. In the evening when he went out to walk the sense of distance that lay all about him did not tempt him to walk and walk, going half insanely forward for hours, trying to break through an intangible wall.

He thought about Mary Cochran. She was a girl from a country town. She must be like millions of American girls. He wondered what went on in her mind as she sat in his class-room, as she walked beside him along the streets of Union Valley, as she played with the children in the yard beside his house.

In the winter, when in the growing darkness of a late afternoon Mary and the children built a snow man in the yard, he went upstairs and stood in the darkness to look out a window. The tall straight figure of the girl, dimly seen, moved quickly about. "Well, nothing has happened to her. She may be anything or nothing. Her figure is like a young tree that has not borne fruit," he thought. He went away to his own room and sat for a long time in the darkness. That night when he left the house for his evening's walk he did not stay long but hurried home and went to his own room. He locked the door. Unconsciously he did not want Winifred to come to the door and disturb his thoughts. Sometimes she did that.

All the time she read novels. She read the novels of Robert Louis Stevenson. When she had read them all she began again.

Sometimes she came upstairs and stood talking by his door. She told some tale, repeated some wise saying that had fallen unexpectedly from the lips of the children. Occasionally she came into the room and turned out the light. There was a couch by a window. She went to sit on the edge of the couch. Something happened. It was as it had been before their marriage. New life came into her figure. He also went to sit on the couch and she put up her hand and touched his face.

Hugh did not want that to happen now. He stood within the room for a moment and then unlocked the door and went to the head of the stairs. "Be quiet when you come up, Winifred. I have a headache and am going to try to sleep," he lied.

When he had gone back to his own room and locked the door again he felt safe. He did not undress but threw himself on the couch and turned out the light.

He thought about Mary Cochran, the school girl, but was sure he thought about her in a quite impersonal way. She was like the woman going to milk cows he had seen across hills when he was a young fellow and walked far and wide over the country to cure the restlessness in himself. In his life she was like the man who threw the stone at dog.

"Well, she is unformed; she is like a young tree," he told himself again. "People are like that. They just grow up suddenly out of childhood. It will happen to my own children. My little Winifred that cannot yet say words will suddenly be like this girl. I have not selected her to think about for any particular reason. For some reason I have drawn away from life and she has brought me back. It might have happened when I saw a child playing in the street or an old man going up a stairway into a house. She does not belong to me. She will go away out of my sight. Winifred and the children will stay on and on here and I will stay on and on. We are imprisoned by the fact that we belong to each other. This Mary Cochran is free, or at least she is free as far as this prison is

concerned. No doubt she will, after a while make a prison of her own and live in it, but I will have nothing to do with the matter."

By the time Mary Cochran was in her third year in the college at Union Valley she had become almost a fixture in the Walker household. Still she did not know Hugh. She knew the children better than he did, perhaps better than their mother. In the fall she and the two boys went to the woods to gather nuts. In the winter they went skating on a little pond near the house.

Winifred accepted her as she accepted everything, the service of the two negroes, the coming of the children, the habitual silence of her husband.

And then quite suddenly and unexpectedly Hugh's silence, that had lasted all through his married life, was broken up. He walked homeward with a German who had the chair of modern languages in the school and got into a violent quarrel. He stopped to speak to men on the street. When he went to putter about in the garden he whistled and sang.

One afternoon in the fall he came home and found the whole family assembled in the living room of the house. The children were playing on the floor and the negress sat in the chair by the window with his youngest child in her arms, crooning one of the negro songs. Mary Cochran was there. She sat reading a book.

Hugh walked directly toward her and looked over her shoulder. At that moment Winifred came into the room. He reached forward and snatched the book out of the girl's hands. She looked up startled. With an oath he threw it into the fire that burned in an open grate at the side of the room. A flood of words ran from him. He cursed books and people and schools. "Damn it all," he said. "What makes you want to read about life— What makes people want to think about life— Why don't they live— Why don't they leave books and thoughts and schools alone—"

He turned to look at his wife who had grown pale and stared at him with a queer fixed uncertain stare. The old negro woman got up and went quickly away. The two older children began to cry. Hugh was miserable. He looked at the startled girl in the chair who also had tears in her eyes, and at his wife. His fingers pulled nervously at his coat. To the two women he looked like a boy who had been caught stealing food in a pantry. "I am having one of my silly irritable spells," he said, looking at his wife but in reality addressing the girl. "You see I am more serious than I pretend to be. I was not irritated by your book but by something else. I see so much that can be done in life and I do so little."

He went upstairs to his own room wondering why he had lied to the two women, why he continually lied to himself.

Did he lie to himself— He tried to answer the question but couldn't. He was like one who walks in the darkness of the hallway of a house and comes to a

blank wall. The old desire to run away from life, to wear himself out physically, came back upon him like a madness.

For a long time he stood in the darkness inside his own room. The children stopped crying and the house became quiet again. He could hear his wife's voice speaking softly and presently the back door of the house banged and he knew the schoolgirl had gone away.

Life in the house began again. Nothing happened. Hugh ate his dinner in silence and went for a long walk. For two weeks Mary Cochran did not come to his house and then one day he saw her on the college grounds. She was no longer one of his pupils. "Please do not desert us because of my rudeness," he said. The girl blushed and said nothing. When he got home that evening she was in the yard beside the house playing with the children. He went at once to his own room. A hard smile came and went on his face. "She isn't like a young tree any more. She is almost like Winifred. She is almost like a person who belongs here, who belongs to me and my life," he thought.

MARY COCHRAN'S visits to the Walker household came to an end very abruptly. One evening when Hugh was in his room she came up the stairway with the two boys. She had dined with the family and was putting the two boys into their beds. It was a privilege she claimed when she dined with the Walkers.

Hugh had hurried upstairs immediately after dining. He knew where his wife was. She was downstairs, sitting under a lamp, reading one of the books of Robert Louis Stevenson.

For a long time Hugh could hear the voices of his children on the floor above. Then the thing happened.

Mary Cochran came down the stairway that led past the door of his room. She stopped, turned back and climbed the stairs again to the room above. Hugh arose and stepped into the hallway. The schoolgirl had returned to the children's room because she had been suddenly overtaken with a hunger to kiss Hugh's oldest boy, now a lad of nine. She crept into the room and stood for a long time looking at the two boys, who unaware of her presence had gone to sleep. Then she stole forward and kissed the boy lightly. When she went out of the room Hugh stood in the darkness waiting for her. He took hold of her hand and led her down the stairs to his own room.

She was terribly afraid and her fright in an odd way pleased him. "Well," he whispered, "you can't understand now what's going to happen here but some day you will. I'm going to kiss you and then I'm going to ask you to go out of this house and never come back."

He held the girl against his body and kissed her upon the cheeks and lips. When he led her to the door she was so weak with fright and with new, strange, trembling desires that she could with difficulty make her way down the stair and

into his wife's presence. "She will lie now," he thought, and heard her voice coming up the stairs like an echo to his thoughts. "I have a terrible headache. I must hurry home," he heard her voice saying. The voice was dull and heavy. It was not the voice of a young girl.

"She is no longer like a young tree," he thought. He was glad and proud of what he had done. When he heard the door at the back of the house close softly his heart jumped. A strange quivering light came into his eyes. "She will be imprisoned but I will have nothing to do with it. She will never belong to me. My hands will never build a prison for her," he thought with grim pleasure.

23: Broadway Attorney

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

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THE LAWYER smiled reassuringly at the youth. "You know my reputation," he said, "and you know that, when you talk to me, you can tell me the entire truth without any worry whatsoever."

The young man nodded nervously. "I know that. I know you're the greatest lawyer in the world. I But I've done a terrible thing, I'm facing jail for a long, long time. And I'm frightened."

The attorney shrugged. "You're not the first man to be in that situation," he observed suavely, "and I assure you that you will certainly not be the last. Now, listen. If you want me to advise you, start at the beginning and tell me your story.

"I've met you in the cafes several I times and I like you. Otherwise I assure you that I wouldn't be bothering I with you in the first place. Make up your mind that I can help you and stop all this nervousness. Go ahead."

The young man wet his lips. "When you saw me around the cafes," he began, "you must have felt that, because I tossed money around as though it meant nothing to me, I was the son of some multi-millionaire who was out to spend a million or two as quickly as possible. I only wish to God that that were true.

"It's not. I'm actually a teller in a bank. And when I tell you that, you already know most of the story. I guess that any time a bank teller goes on a spending spree, the answer isn't too difficult to supply."

"I don't know how I started. Oh, well. I guess that's not quite true. I started to steal because I liked the Broadway life. I suppose you've listened to many similar cases, but I honestly believed that I could return every penny before they'd ever catch up with me. "You know how it goes. If I owed $5,000 to the bank, I figured that it would be simple to make that up in a stock deal or by cashing one good bet on a horse. I kept taking more and more— and the more I bet or the more I gambled on the stocks the more I lost.

"As I understand it, there is to be an examination of the books and records within two or three days. There isn't a chance in the world that I can replace the money I took in that time— or in any time. Because, Mr. Fallon, I have stolen almost $150,000 dollars."

The attorney whistled. "One hundred and fifty thousand dollars!" he repeated. "You do things thoroughly, don't you? You spoke the truth when you stated that you had no chance of replacing the money. We must figure some other way out of the difficulty."

He looked out of the window. His mind seemed a million miles away. Suddenly he wheeled in his chair.

"Can you steal $300,000 dollars more?" was his amazing question.

The teller's mouth opened wide. He started to talk. He stopped. He swallowed hard. Then the words came. "I— I think so," he replied. "In fact, I'm sure of it. Nobody suspects me at the moment, and the entire organisation trusts me implicitly. I can take that much— and more— without any trouble. But why?"

The Broadway attorney, one of the most famous characters in courtroom history, waved a hand. "Don't ask too many questions. If you want to put yourself in my hands, do exactly as I advise you. And I think I can get you out of this.

"There are three things you will have to do. First, you will take the $300,000 at your earliest opportunity, and turn it over to me. Secondly, you will sign a statement that I will dictate. And last, you will leave for South America on the first boat after I have the money in my hands.

"Then, within three months, you will be able to return to America without the slightest trouble. It may even be sooner than that; it all depends, of course, on the way things go. Do you want to go through with it?"

The young man nodded.

"Yes. It's the only chance I have."

EXACTLY three days later the attorney sat before a gathering of the bank officials. He had been talking for fully half an hour. Now he leaned back and lit a cigarette.

"And there, gentlemen," he concluded easily, "is the entire story. Because he was underpaid and because he couldn't withstand temptation, that boy stole $450,000. I tell you very frankly that he has gone to Europe and that there isn't a chance that you will ever catch him.

"But if, by some great coincidence, you do catch him— then what? The money is still gone, and all the jails in the world will not bring it back to you. Consider my proposition carefully, and I think that common sense will show you its worth.

"Give me a signed statement that the boy will not be prosecuted, and I will have him turn back $150,000 of the $450,000 that he stole. Before he left, he told me that he still had that sum in a vault. I know that with a convincing talk on my part I can have him return it to you.

"You see how very simple my proposition really is, gentlemen? You have lost $450,000 dollars. By a move that will mean nothing to you, you can cut that loss to $300,000 dollars. Surely there can be no doubt as to which is the best way to turn.

"I'm going back to my office. You can call me at your leisure."

THE following morning, the attorney wirelessed his client's boat and told him to return to America from the next port. Then, looking at the $150,000 dollars he had added to his bank account, he smiled happily.

"Making money is easy," he mused. "If you know how."

End