PAST MASTERS 248

Mark Hellinger

H. Bedford-Jones

P. C. Wren

Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

Georges Surdez

Katherine Mansfield

Mark Twain

Damon Runyon

Edward Dyson

and more

Past Masters 248

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 Dust-Cloud

E. F. Benson

1867-1940

The Pall Mall Magazine Jan 1906

Collected in: *The Room in the Tower*, 1912

THE big French windows were open on to the lawn, and, dinner being over, two or three of the party who were staying for the week at the end of August with the Combe-Martins had strolled out on to the terrace to look at the sea, over which the moon, large and low, was just rising and tracing a path of pale gold from horizon to shore, while others, less lunar of inclination, had gone in search of bridge or billiards. Coffee had come round immediately after dessert, and the end of dinner, according to the delectable custom of the house, was as informal as the end of breakfast. Every one, that is to say, remained or went away, smoked, drank port or abstained, according to his personal tastes. Thus, on this particular evening it so happened that Harry Combe-Martin and I were very soon left alone in the dining-room, because we were talking unmitigated motor "shop," and the rest of the party (small wonder) were bored with it, and had left us. The shop was home-shop, so to speak, for it was almost entirely concerned with the manifold perfections of the new six-cylinder Napier which my host in a moment of extravagance, which he did not in the least regret, had just purchased; in which, too, he proposed to take me over to lunch at a friend's house near Hunstanton on the following day. He observed with legitimate pride that an early start would not be necessary as the distance was only eighty miles and there were no police traps.

"Queer things these big motors are," he said, relapsing into generalities as we rose to go. "Often I can scarcely believe that my new car is merely a machine. It seems to me to possess an independent life of its own. It is really much more like a thoroughbred with a wonderfully fine mouth."

"And the moods of a thoroughbred?" I asked.

"No; it's got an excellent temper, I'm glad to say. It doesn't mind being checked, or even stopped, when it's going its best. Some of these big cars can't stand that. They get sulky— I assure you it is literally true— if they are checked too often."

He paused on his way to ring the bell. "Guy Elphinstone's car, for instance," he said: "it was a bad-tempered brute, a violent, vicious beast of a car."

"What make?" I asked.

"Twenty-five horse-power Amédée. They are a fretful strain of car; too thin, not enough bone— and bone is very good for the nerves. The brute liked running over a chicken or a rabbit, though perhaps it was less the car's ill-

temper than Guy's, poor chap. Well, he paid for it— he paid to the uttermost farthing. Did you know him?"

"No; but surely I have heard the name. Ah, yes, he ran over a child, did he not?"

"Yes," said Harry, "and then smashed up against his own park gates."

"Killed, wasn't he?"

"Oh yes, killed instantly, and the car just a heap of splinters. There's an odd story about it, I'm told, in the village: rather in your line."

"Ghosts?" I asked.

"Yes, the ghost of his motor-car. Seems almost too up-to-date, doesn't it?"

"And what's the story?" I demanded.

"Why, just this. His place was outside the village of Bircham, ten miles out from Norwich; and there's a long straight bit of road there— that's where he ran over the child— and a couple of hundred yards farther on, a rather awkward turn into the park gates. Well, a month or two ago, soon after the accident, one old gaffer in the village swore he had seen a motor there coming full tilt along the road, but without a sound, and it disappeared at the lodge gates of the park, which were shut. Soon after another said he had heard a motor whirl by him at the same place, followed by a hideous scream, but he saw nothing."

"The scream is rather horrible," said I.

"Ah, I see what you mean! I only thought of his syren. Guy had a syren on his exhaust, same as I have. His had a dreadful frightened sort of wail, and always made me feel creepy."

"And is that all the story?" I asked: "that one old man thought he saw a noiseless motor, and another thought he heard an invisible one?"

Harry flicked the ash off his cigarette into the grate. "Oh dear no!" he said. "Half a dozen of them have seen something or heard something. It is quite a heavily authenticated yarn."

"Yes, and talked over and edited in the public-house," I said.

"Well, not a man of them will go there after dark. Also the lodge-keeper gave notice a week or two after the accident. He said he was always hearing a motor stop and hoot outside the lodge, and he was kept running out at all hours of the night to see what it was."

"And what was it?"

"It wasn't anything. Simply nothing there. He thought it rather uncanny, anyhow, and threw up a good post. Besides, his wife was always hearing a child scream, and while her man toddled out to the gate she would go and see whether the kids were all right. And the kids themselves—'

"Ah, what of them?" I asked.

"They kept coming to their mother, asking who the little girl was who walked up and down the road and would not speak to them or play with them."

"It's a many-sided story," I said. "All the witnesses seem to have heard and seen different things."

"Yes, that is just what to my mind makes the yarn so good," he said. "Personally I don't take much stock in spooks at all. But given that there are such things as spooks, and given that the death of the child and the death of Guy have caused spooks to play about there, it seems to me a very good point that different people should be aware of different phenomena. One hears the car, another sees it, one hears the child scream, another sees the child. How does that strike you?"

This, I am bound to say, was a new view to me, and the more I thought of it the more reasonable it appeared. For the vast majority of mankind have all those occult senses by which is perceived the spiritual world (which, I hold, is thick and populous around us), sealed up, as it were; in other words, the majority of mankind never hear or see a ghost at all. Is it not, then, very probable that of the remainder— those, in fact, to whom occult experiences have happened or can happen— few should have every sense unsealed, but that some should have the unsealed ear, others the unsealed eye— that some should be clairaudient, others clairvoyant?

"Yes, it strikes me as reasonable," I said. "Can't you take me over there?"

"Certainly! If you will stop till Friday I'll take you over on Thursday. The others all go that day, so that we can get there after dark."

I shook my head. "I can't stop till Friday, I'm afraid," I said. "I must leave on Thursday. But how about to-morrow? Can't we take it on the way to or from Hunstanton?"

"No; it's thirty miles out of our way. Besides, to be at Bircham after dark means that we shouldn't get back here till midnight. And as host to my guests—'

"Ah! things are only heard and seen after dark, are they?" I asked. "That makes it so much less interesting. It is like a séance where all lights are put out."

"Well, the accident happened at night," he said. "I don't know the rules, but that may have some bearing on it, I should think."

I had one question more in the back of my mind, but I did not like to ask it. At least, I wanted information on this subject without appearing to ask for it.

"Neither do I know the rules of motors," I said; "and I don't understand you when you say that Guy Elphinstone's machine was an irritable, cross-grained brute, that liked running over chickens and rabbits. But I think you subsequently said that the irritability may have been the irritability of its owner. Did he mind being checked?"

"It made him blind-mad if it happened often," said Harry. "I shall never forget a drive I had with him once: there were hay-carts and perambulators every hundred yards. It was perfectly ghastly; it was like being with a madman. And when we got inside his gate, his dog came running out to meet him. He did

not go an inch out of his course: it was worse than that— he went for it, just grinding his teeth with rage. I never drove with him again."

He stopped a moment, guessing what might be in my mind. "I say, you mustn't think— you mustn't think—" he began.

"No, of course not," said I.

Harry Combe-Martin's house stood close to the weather-eaten, sandy cliffs of the Suffolk shore, which are being incessantly gnawed away by the hunger of the insatiable sea. Fathoms deep below it, and now many hundred yards out, lies what was once the second port in England; but now of the ancient town of Dunwich, and of its seven great churches, nothing remains but one, and that ruinous and already half destroyed by the falling cliff and the encroachments of the sea. Foot by foot, it too is disappearing, and of the graveyard which surrounded it more than half is gone, so that from the face of the sandy cliff on which it stands there stick out like straws in glass, as Dante says, the bones of those who were once committed there to the kindly and stable earth.

Whether it was the remembrance of this rather grim spectacle as I had seen it that afternoon, or whether Harry's story had caused some trouble in my brain, or whether it was merely that the keen bracing air of this place, to one who had just come from the sleepy languor of the Norfolk Broads, kept me sleepless, I do not know; but, anyhow, the moment I put out my light that night and got into bed, I felt that all the footlights and gas-jets in the internal theatre of my mind sprang into flame, and that I was very vividly and alertly awake. It was in vain that I counted a hundred forwards and a hundred backwards, that I pictured to myself a flock of visionary sheep coming singly through a gap in an imaginary hedge, and tried to number their monotonous and uniform countenances, that I played noughts and crosses with myself, that I marked out scores of double lawn-tennis courts,— for with each repetition of these supposedly soporific exercises I only became more intensely wakeful. It was not in remote hope of sleep that I continued to repeat these weary performances long after their inefficacy was proved to the hilt, but because I was strangely unwilling in this timeless hour of the night to think about those protruding relics of humanity; also I quite distinctly did not desire to think about that subject with regard to which I had, a few hours ago, promised Harry that I would not make it the subject of reflection. For these reasons I continued during the black hours to practise these narcotic exercises of the mind, knowing well that if I paused on the tedious treadmill my thoughts, like some released spring, would fly back to rather gruesome subjects. I kept my mind, in fact, talking loud to itself, so that it should not hear what other voices were saying.

Then by degrees these absurd mental occupations became impossible; my mind simply refused to occupy itself with them any longer; and next moment I was thinking intently and eagerly, not about the bones protruding from the

gnawed section of sand-cliff, but about the subject I had said I would not dwell upon. And like a flash it came upon me why Harry had bidden me not think about it. Surely in order that I should not come to the same conclusion as he had come to.

Now the whole question of "haunt"— haunted spots, haunted houses, and so forth— has always seemed to me to be utterly unsolved, and to be neither proved nor disproved to a satisfactory degree. From the earliest times, certainly from the earliest known Egyptian records, there has been a belief that the scene of a crime is often revisited, sometimes by the spirit of him who has committed it— seeking rest, we must suppose, and finding none; sometimes, and more inexplicably, by the spirit of his victim, crying perhaps, like the blood of Abel, for vengeance. And though the stories of these village gossips in the alehouse about noiseless visions and invisible noises were all as yet unsifted and unreliable, yet I could not help wondering if they (such as they were) pointed to something authentic and to be classed under this head of appearances. But more striking than the yarns of the gaffers seemed to me the questions of the lodge-keeper's children. How should children have imagined the figure of a child that would not speak to them or play with them? Perhaps it was a real child, a sulky child. Yes— perhaps. But perhaps not. Then after this preliminary skirmish I found myself settling down to the question that I had said I would not think about; in other words, the possible origin of these phenomena interested me more than the phenomena themselves. For what exactly had Guy Elphinstone, that savage driver, done? Had or had not the death of the child been entirely an accident, a thing (given he drove a motor at all) outside his own control? Or had he, irritated beyond endurance at the checks and delays of the day, not pulled up when it was just possible he might have, but had run over the child as he would have run over a rabbit or a hen, or even his own dog? And what, in any case, poor wretched brute, must have been his thoughts in that terrible instant that intervened between the child's death and his own, when a moment later he smashed into the closed gates of his own lodge? Was remorse his— bitter, despairing contrition? That could hardly have been so; or else surely, knowing only for certain that he had knocked a child down, he would have stopped; he would have{32} done his best, whatever that might be, to repair the irreparable harm. But he had not stopped: he had gone on, it seemed, at full speed, for on the collision the car had been smashed into matchwood and steel shavings. Again, with double force, had this dreadful thing been a complete accident, he would have stopped. So then— most terrible question of all— had he, after making murder, rushed on to what proved to be his own death, filled with some hellish glee at what he had done? Indeed, as in the churchyard on the cliff, bones of the buried stuck starkly out into the night.

THE PALE tired light of earliest morning had turned the window-blinds into glimmering squares before I slept; and when I woke, the servant who called me was already rattling them briskly up on their rollers, and letting the calm serenity of the August day stream into the room. Through the open windows poured in sunlight and sea-wind, the scent of flowers and the song of birds; and each and all were wonderfully reassuring, banishing the hooded forms that had haunted the night, and I thought of the disquietude of the dark hours as a traveller may think of the billows and tempests of the ocean over which he has safely journeyed, unable, now that they belong to the limbo of the past, to recall his qualms and tossings with any vivid uneasiness. Not without a feeling of relief, too, did I dwell on the knowledge that I was definitely not going to visit this equivocal spot. Our drive to-day, as Harry had said, would not take us within thirty miles of it, and to-morrow I but went to the station and away. Though a thorough-paced seeker after truth might, no doubt, have regretted that the laws of time and space did not permit him to visit Bircham after the sinister dark had fallen, and test whether for him there was visible or audible truth in the tales of the village gossips, I was conscious of no such regret. Bircham and its fables had given me a very bad night, and I was perfectly aware that I did not in the least want to go near it, though yesterday I had quite truthfully said I should like to do so. In this brightness, too, of sun and sea-wind I felt none of the *malaise* at my waking moments which a sleepless night usually gives me; I felt particularly well, particularly pleased to be alive, and also, as I have said, particularly content not to be going to Bircham. I was quite satisfied to leave my curiosity unsatisfied.

The motor came round about eleven, and we started at once, Harry and Mrs Morrison, a cousin of his, sitting behind in the big back seat, large enough to hold a comfortable three, and I on the left of the driver, in a sort of trance— I am not ashamed to confess it— of expectancy and delight. For this was in the early days of motors, when there was still the sense of romance and adventure round them. I did not want to drive, any more than Harry wanted to; for driving, so I hold, is too absorbing; it takes the attention in too firm a grip: the mania of the true motorist is not consciously enjoyed. For the passion for motors is a taste— I had almost said a gift— as distinct and as keenly individual as the passion for music or mathematics. Those who use motors most (merely as a means of getting rapidly from one place to another) are often entirely without it, while those whom adverse circumstances (over which they have no control) compel to use them least may have it to a supreme degree. To those who have it, analysis of their passion is perhaps superfluous; to those who have it not, explanation is almost unintelligible. Pace, however, and the control of pace, and above all the sensuous consciousness of pace, is at the root of it; and pleasure in pace is common to most people, whether it be in the form of a galloping horse,

or the pace of the skate hissing over smooth ice, or the pace of a free-wheel bicycle humming down-hill, or, more impersonally, the pace of the smashed ball at lawn-tennis, the driven ball at golf, or the low boundary hit at cricket. But the sensuous consciousness of pace, as I have said, is needful: one might experience it seated in front of the engine of an express train, though not in a wadded, shut-windowed carriage, where the wind of movement is not felt. Then add to this rapture of the rush through riven air the knowledge that huge relentless force is controlled by a little lever, and directed by a little wheel on which the hands of the driver seem to lie so negligently. A great untamed devil has there his bridle, and he answers to it, as Harry had said, like a horse with a fine mouth. He has hunger and thirst, too, unslakeable, and greedily he laps of his soup of petrol which turns to fire in his mouth: electricity, the force that rends clouds asunder, and causes towers to totter, is the spoon with which he feeds himself; and as he eats he races onward, and the road opens like torn linen in front of him. Yet how obedient, how amenable is he!— for with a touch on his snaffle his speed is redoubled, or melts into thin air, so that before you know you have touched the rein he has exchanged his swallow-flight for a mere saunter through the lanes. But he ever loves to run; and knowing this, you will bid him lift up his voice and tell those who are in his path that he is coming, so that he will not need the touch that checks. Hoarse and jovial is his voice, hooting to the wayfarer; and if his hooting be not heard he has a great guttural falsetto scream that leaps from octave to octave, and echoes from the hedges that are passing in blurred lines of hanging green. And, as you go, the romantic isolation of divers in deep seas is yours; masked and hooded companions may be near you also, in their driving-dress for this plunge through the swift tides of air; but you, like them, are alone and isolated, conscious only of the ripped riband of road, the two great lantern-eyes of the wonderful monster that look through drooped eyelids by day, but gleam with fire by night, the two ear-laps of splash-boards, and the long lean bonnet in front which is the skull and brain-case of that swift, untiring energy that feeds on fire, and whirls its two tons of weight up hill and down dale, as if some new law as everlasting as gravity, and like gravity making it go ever swifter, was its sole control.

For the first hour the essence of these joys, any description of which compared to the real thing is but as a stagnant pond compared to the bright rushing of a mountain stream, was mine. A straight switchback road lay in front of us, and the monster plunged silently down hill, and said below his breath, "Ha-ha— ha-ha— ha-ha," as, without diminution of speed, he breasted the opposing slope. In my control were his great vocal chords (for in those days hooter and syren were on the driver's left, and lay convenient, to the hand of him who occupied the box-seat), and it rejoiced me to let him hoot to a pony-cart, three hundred yards ahead, with a hand on his falsetto scream if his

ordinary tones of conversation were unheard or disregarded. Then came a road crossing ours at right angles, and the dear monster seemed to say, "Yes, yes,— see how obedient and careful I am. I stroll with my hands in my pockets." Then again a puppy from a farmhouse staggered warlike into the road, and the monster said, "Poor little chap! get home to your mother, or I'll talk to you in earnest." The poor little chap did not take the hint, so the monster slackened speed and just said, "Whoof!" Then it chuckled to itself as the puppy scuttled into the hedge, seriously alarmed; and next moment our self-made wind screeched and whistled round us again.

Napoleon, I believe, said that the power of an army lay in its feet: that is true also of the monster. There was a loud bang, and in thirty seconds we were at a standstill. The monster's off fore-foot troubled it, and the chauffeur said, "Yes, sir,— burst."

So the burst boot was taken off and a new one put on, a boot that had never been on foot before. The foot in question was held up on a jack during this operation, and the new boot laced up with a pump. This took exactly twenty-five minutes. Then the monster got his spoon going again, and said, "Let me run: oh, let me run!" And for fifteen miles on a straight and empty road it ran. I timed the miles, but shall not produce their chronology for the benefit of a forsworn constabulary.

But there were no more dithyrambics that morning. We should have reached Hunstanton in time for lunch. Instead, we waited to repair our fourth puncture at 1.45 P.M., twenty-five miles short of our destination. This fourth puncture was caused by a spicule of flint three-quarters of an inch long— sharp, it is true, but weighing perhaps two pennyweights, while we weighed two tons. It seemed an impertinence. So we lunched at a wayside inn, and during lunch the pundits held a consultation, of which the upshot was this:

We had no more boots for our monster, for his off fore-foot had burst once, and punctured once (thus necessitating two socks and one boot). Similarly, but more so, his off hind-foot had burst twice (thus necessitating two boots and two socks). Now, there was no certain shoemaker's shop at Hunstanton, as far as we knew, but there was a regular universal store at King's Lynn, which was about equidistant.

And, so said the chauffeur, there was something wrong with the monster's spoon (ignition), and he didn't rightly know what, and therefore it seemed the prudent part not to go to Hunstanton (lunch, a thing of the preterite, having been the object), but to the well-supplied King's Lynn. And we all breathed a pious hope that we might get there.

Whizz: hoot: purr! The last boot held, the spoon went busily to the monster's mouth, and we just flowed into King's Lynn. The return journey, so I vaguely gathered, would be made by other roads; but personally, intoxicated

with air and movement, I neither asked nor desired to know what those roads would be. This one small but rather salient fact is necessary to record here, that as we waited at King's Lynn, and as we buzzed homewards afterwards, no thought of Bircham entered my head at all. The subsequent hallucination, if hallucination it was, was not, as far as I know, self-suggested. That we had gone out of our way for the sake of the garage, I knew, and that was all. Harry also told me that he did not know where our road would take us.

The rest that follows is the baldest possible narrative of what actually occurred. But it seems to me, a humble student of the occult, to be curious.

While we waited we had tea in a hotel looking on to a big empty square of houses, and after tea we waited a very long time for our monster to pick us up. Then the telephone from the garage inquired for "the gentleman on the motor," and since Harry had strolled out to get a local evening paper with news of the last Test Match, I applied ear and mouth to that elusive instrument. What I heard was not encouraging: the ignition had gone very wrong indeed, and "perhaps" in an hour we should be able to start. It was then about half-past six, and we were just seventy-eight miles from Dunwich.

Harry came back soon after this, and I told him what the message from the garage had been. What he said was this: "Then we shan't get back till long after dinner. We might just as well have camped out to see your ghost."

As I have already said, no notion of Bircham was in my mind, and I mention this as evidence that, even if it had been, Harry's remark would have implied that we were not going through Bircham.

The hour lengthened itself into an hour and a half. Then the monster, quite well again, came hooting round the corner, and we got in.

"Whack her up, Jack," said Harry to the chauffeur. "The roads will be empty. You had better light up at once."

The monster, with its eyes agleam, was whacked up, and never in my life have I been carried so cautiously and yet so swiftly. Jack never took a risk or the possibility of a risk, but when the road was clear and open he let the monster run just as fast as it was able. Its eyes made day of the road fifty yards ahead, and the romance of night was fairyland round us. Hares started from the roadside, and raced in front of us for a hundred yards, then just wheeled in time to avoid the ear-flaps of the great triumphant brute that carried us. Moths flitted across, struck sometimes by the lenses of its eyes, and the miles peeled over our shoulders. When It occurred we were going top-speed. And this was It— quite unsensational, but to us quite inexplicable unless my midnight imaginings happened to be true.

As I have said, I was in command of the hooter and of the syren. We were flying along on a straight down-grade, as fast as ever we could go, for the engines were working, though the decline was considerable. Then quite

suddenly I saw in front of us a thick cloud of dust, and knew instinctively and on the instant, without thought or reasoning, what that must mean. Evidently something going very fast (or else so large a cloud could not have been raised) was in front of us, and going in the same direction as ourselves. Had it been something on the road coming to meet us, we should of course have seen the vehicle first and run into the dust-cloud afterwards. Had it, again, been something of low speed— a horse and dog-cart, for instance— no such dust could have been raised. But, as it was, I knew at once that there was a motor travelling swiftly just ahead of us, also that it was not going as fast as we were, or we should have run into its dust much more gradually. But we went into it as into a suddenly lowered curtain.

Then I shouted to Jack. "Slow down, and put on the brake," I shrieked. "There's something just ahead of us."

As I spoke I wrought a wild concerto on the hooter, and with my right hand groped for the syren, but did not find it. Simultaneously I heard a wild, frightened shriek, just as if I had sounded the syren myself. Jack had felt for it too, and our hands fingered each other. Then we entered the dust-cloud.

We slowed down with extraordinary rapidity, and still peering ahead we went dead-slow through it. I had not put on my goggles after leaving King's Lynn, and the dust stung and smarted in my eyes. It was not, therefore, a belt of fog, but real road-dust. And at the moment we crept through it I felt Harry's hands on my shoulder.

"There's something just ahead," he said. "Look! don't you see the tail light?"

As a matter of fact, I did not; and, still going very slow, we came out of that dust-cloud. The broad empty road stretched in front of us; a hedge was on each side, and there was no turning either to right or left. Only, on the right, was a lodge, and gates which were closed. The lodge had no lights in any window.

Then we came to a standstill; the air was dead-calm, not a leaf in the hedgerow trees was moving, not a grain of dust was lifted from the road. But, behind, the dust-cloud still hung in the air, and stopped dead-short at the closed lodge-gates. We had moved very slowly for the last hundred yards: it was difficult to suppose that it was of our making. Then Jack spoke, with a curious crack in his voice.

"It must have been a motor, sir," he said. "But where is it?"

I had no reply to this, and from behind another voice, Harry's voice, spoke. For the moment I did not recognise it, for it was strained and faltering.

"Did you open the syren?" he asked. "It didn't sound like our syren. It sounded like, like—'

"I didn't open the syren," said I.

Then we went on again. Soon we came to scattered lights in houses by the wayside.

"What's this place?" I asked Jack.
"Bircham, sir," said he.

2: The Clutching Shadow

Wilson Collison

1893-1941

Startling Detective Adventures, March 1930

JIMMIE BRENLIN, of the Newton detective bureau, shook his head and smiled in a perplexed manner. He glanced up at Hiller and saw the grim-faced inspector eyeing him gravely. Brenlin understood in a dim way that Hiller expected him immeditely to advance some theory or completely to abandon the argument he had set forth five minutes after looking at the body of the darkfaced man huddled in the big chair before a fireplace the grate of which contained nothing but dead ashes.

"Why do you think this man was murdered?" asked Hiller, tersely.

Brenlin made a motion of protest with one hand and rubbed his chin for a moment in reflective silence.

"Maybe it's just a hunch," he answered, with a faint smile.

"We don't play hunches in this department, Jimmie," Hiller remarked acidly. "Time's too valuable. You were the first one here. I guess."

"The first one on the job after his butler called," Brenlin returned seriously.

"What'd you see?"

"Just what we're looking at now." Brenlin shrugged a little and glanced again at the man huddled in the chair.

"The gun was in his hand— the way he's holding it now?" Hiller questioned.

"Exactly. I haven't moved it a fraction of an inch."

"That note he scribbled was there, too?"

"Yes."

"Then everything points to a plain case of suicide," Hiller said shortly. "IVe gone over the room minutely. The windows are all locked. You said the door was locked— "

"Yes. I broke it in with the aid of the butler."

"Well, then, how can a man be murdered in a locked room— in a lonely old house like this?" Hiller smiled half contemptuously. "The gun's in his hand— powder burns on his head— one bullet has been fired right into his brain— his hand fell to the table in precisely the way you see it now. Isn't that plain enough to you?''

"No, sir," Brenlin returned stubbornly; "it is not."

Hiller shot him a swift look, half questioning, half disdainful. Then he took out his watch and glanced at it.

"I've got to get back to town, Jimmie," Hiller said. "Do you want to do anything before I send the medical examiner out?"

"I'd like to- look into the case a little further," Brenlin replied soberly. "I may find something. If you can give me an hour on the job—"

Hiller laughed. He turned on his heel and strode across to the broad French windows and swept back the heavy draperies with a single movement of his big hand. He stood for a moment gazing out into the rain-swept blackness of the night.

"I'll leave you on the job— give you an hour before I send Parkins out." Hiller swung about and faced Brenlin. "If there's any suspicion in your mind— if you get anything definite— give me a ring before midnight. I want the case closed quickly. I've gathered some of the details of Carter's life from his butler. He lived here alone with the one servant. Damned creepy old house, I say." Hiller turned up the collar of his raincoat and pulled his soft gray hat down firmly upon his head. Then he lighted a cigar and looked thoughtfully at the body of the man in the chair. A deep and ghastly silence seemed to settle over the room. Outside the wind moaned; the rain spattered against the windows, driven in the face of the swirling gusts of air.

Hiller appeared to be studying the situation in speculative silence; and while he was watching the body in the chair, Jimmie Brenlin was looking, with suddenly startled eyes, at the faint shadow of a hand, dimly outlined in the gloom on the wall in the far corner of the room.

The hand moved slowly; paused as if suspended for a single instant on some thin, invisible wire— and disappeared.

Brenlin caught his breath sharply. He looked at Hiller. The big inspector was moving toward the door that opened into the outer hall. He swung about as he reached for the door-knob.

"You ambitious young fellows," he said with a smile, "ought to be commended; but when you've been in the service as long as I have, your only idea will be to close them up as soon as possible. You're a good boy, though. Jimmie— one of the best in the homicide squad." He passed through the door into the heavy, blanketed darkness beyond.

Jimmie Brenlin heard the door close. He smiled grimly. His eyes instinctively sought that mysterious shadow on the wall again— but it was not there. With a single bound he reached the windows and held the draperies back. He saw the dull flash of the headlights on Hiller's car; heard the humming of the motor as it passed along the driveway. Then that appalling silence settled over everything again.

HE WALKED across to the fireplace and got down upon his knees; but all the time he was warily watching and listening. He had the strange, almost haunting feeling that mysterious, prying eyes were watching him from some shadowed

corner of the room. He could not shake off the feeling; it persisted and even grew. It did not accord with his general plan to be watched.

He ran his hand in among the soft, gray ashes, and brushed them aside. He knew the simple little clue was buried there, because he had seen it but a moment before Hiller had entered the room.

With a short intake of his breath, he found it. He pulled it out and blew his breath upon it to dust off the light coating of ashes. He shoved it into his pocket without looking at it, screening it in the palm of his hand so that it might not be seen by those eyes he now knew beyond the shadow of any doubt were watching him.

He walked back to the side of the dead man and peered into his face. It was a dark, sullenly handsome face. The man was fully clothed in evening wear. The table was littered with licquor bottles and empty glasses. In a tray there were five or six half-burned cigarettes. Brenlin took one of them up casually and examined it. He smiled and tossed it back. He was not wrong. His first theory was now positively proved. Carter had not been alone in the room at the time of his death.

He heard the sudden, sharp click of a door-latch behind him. He whirled about sharply, and touched the butt of his automatic in his raincoat pocket. From out of the shadows he heard the low, suave voice of the butler.

"Is there anything I can do, sir?" the man asked solemnly as he stepped into the circle of light streaming out from under the shade of the lamp upon the table at his back.

Brenlin made no reply for a moment. He studied the thin, ashen face of the servant with cool, speculative eyes.

He knew that the man had a deeply rooted strategic position— one from which it would be exceedingly difficult to pry him loose.

"Sit down a minute," Brenlin said curtly. "I want to ask you some questions."

"But, sir, I've told you all I know," the butler protested, with a slight motion of one hand.

"All right," Brenlin retorted, "but I want to talk to you. Come here—" He stepped back, caught hold of a chair and drew it back a short way from the table.

The man crossed the room with the deliberate, softfooted tread of a cat. He paused beside the chair and peered closely into Brenlin's face.

Brenlin, looking into the man's dark eyes, was conscious of a queer chill creeping up and down his spine. Those eyes were weird, cold, piercing pin-points of fire that seemed to burn right through him.

"Sit here," he commanded, and touched the chair with one hand, while he kept the fingers of the other hand upon the gun in his pocket.

"Very good, sir," the butler agreed gravely; and dropped into the chair with a faint smile mirrored upon his gray face.

"You told me your name was Jarvis, didn't you?" Brenlin inquired casually. He lounged back against the edge of the table and lighted a cigarette.

"That is correct, sir," the man answered in a monotone.

Brenlin watched him closely. He was abruptly conscious of a certain tension that had sprung up between them. Obviously, the man was cautions, on the defensive, for some intangible reason.

"How long have you been here with Mr. Carter?" Brenlin asked, taking a puff at his cigarette.

"Five years, sir."

"Who was in this house— in this room with him before you heard the sound of the shot?" Brenlin leaned forward and looked into the man's face sharply.

"There was no one in the house, no one in the room, sir," Jarvis replied imperturably. with a slight shrug of his narrow shoulders.

"DON'T lie to me!" Brenlin reached out and gripped the other by the arm with vise-like fingers.

"I'm not lying to you, sir." Jarvis glanced up into Brenlin's face. "Mr. Carter had been home all day. There were no callers. Mr. Carter was in the habit of locking himself in the study after dinner, sir. He did so tonight. When 1 heard the sound of the shot— I think it must have been about nine o'clock— "

"How do you know it was about nine o'clock?" Brenlin rasped. "After you heard the shot, did you stop to look at your watch?"

Jarvis merely shrugged his shoulders and made a little gesture with one hand.

"But a moment before I heard the report of the pistol, sir," he remarked gravely, "I heard the clock chime in the hall."

"You've got a hell of a fine memory for details!" Brenlin said with a laugh.

"I have that, sir."

Brenlin felt momentarily undecided. He moved away from the table and took a turn about the room, all the while watching the butler warily. The man did not stir in the chair; he sat like some wax image, with his hands folded in his lap, his dark eyes staring straight ahead of him.

Brenlin tried to call to his mind some simple and swifter expedient to delve into the man's mind, to loosen his tongue; but he knew the man was far too shrewd to be tricked. He strode back to the table and took the small, automatic pistol from the hand of the dead man and examined it speculatively.

"Did Mr. Carter always keep a revolver on his desk?" he asked in a low tone.

"Invariably, sir."

"Why? Was he afraid of something— someone?"

"Not that I know of, sir."

"Did he keep large sums of money in the house— valuables or securities of any sort?"

"No, sir." Jarvis glanced up quickly; there was something apologetic and defiant in that glance. Brenlin catalogued it swiftly in his mind.

"This gun," Brenlin said, "is of German make." He spoke quietly enough, but there was a certain emphasis in his voice. "It's not a common firearm by any means."

"As to that, I can not say, sir."

Brenlin tossed the gun back upon the table. He walked over to a large chair near the fireplace and sat down upon the arm erf it; he took out his cigarette case in an abstracted manner.

"I guess it's a case of suicide, all right," he said. "I'll have to wait here, though, until the medical examiner gets out. Will you have a cigarette, Jarvis?" He rose and moved toward the man with a smile.

"Thank you, no, sir," Jarvis returned. "I do not smoke."

"ALL right." Brenlin slipped one of the tubes between his lips and lighted it.

"Has Mr. Carter any relatives?" Brenlin inquired, walking back toward the table.

"Only a distant cousin, sir," Jarvis answered. He straightened in the chair, turned his head a little, and looked directly at Brenlin. "A young Mr. Lanier, who lives in New York. I have already telephoned him, sir."

"You have, eh?" Brenlin leaned against the edge of the table again, smoking in a seemingly imperturable manner; but all the time his head was working; a confused medley of thoughts were darting through his brain. He felt instinctively that this was going to be simply a case of working backward from the climax. There were few connecting links to carry him along. The murder— and he knew positively that it was murder— had been so neatly and skillfully planned and carried out that few tangible clews had been left behind. Whoever had used the gun had worn rubber gloves : there was not a single finger-print on anything in the room. Jimmie Brenlin, though, had never had a great deal of faith in the finger-print system. He reveled in deduction, the methodical building up of motives, the eliminations and additions of small, seemingly insignificant, factors in crime.

"I am expecting Mr. Lanier out within half an hour, sir." Jarvis rose from the chair and stood facing Brenlin, his face clearly outlined in the glow from the lamp.

Brenlin was not sure, but he had the feeling that there was a sardonic note of humor in the man's low, suave tones.

"Was he on friendly terms with Mr. Carter?" Brenlin asked.

"Oh, quite, sir." Jarvis smiled. "Mr. Carter was very fond of his cousin, sir. He frequently drove out here to visit with him."

"I see." Brenlin yawned. "You don't seem to be greatly upset over Mr. Carter's unexpected death."

"In a way, I am greatly shocked, sir; but I have looked for it for some time, sir. He was a man to brood, to worry, sir."

"What about?"

"That I can not tell you, sir; but he sometimes sat for hours at this very table here and stared into space, just thinking."

"When we broke in the door," Brenlin said thoughtfully, "I noticed that the key was lying on the floor."

"Yes, sir. Mr. Carter always locked himself in this room. I presume that when we forced the door, the key fell from the lock, sir."

"Unquestionably," Brenlin returned, trying to keep the note of sarcasm out of his tone, which he knew was there despite his effort. "In the note found on the desk at his elbow, Mr. Carter merely said that he was tired of living and had decided to end it all."

"I have many times heard him say that same thing, sir," Jarvis said, shaking his head gravely, and looking at the huddled body in the chair with sorrowful eyes.

A SUDDEN question leaped to Brcnlin's lips, but he smothered it. He would have to employ an extreme measure of caution with this man. He was inordinately cunning; and there was nothing to point to his connection with the murder of Gardner Carter.

He glanced sharply at the butler. The man's eyes were bright, with the glint of hard, polished metal. Brenlin frowned. Jarvis was not inclined for more than desultory conversation. He seemed to possess the gift of making silence eloquent. Brenlin watched him half resentfully; but there was nothing for him to do but wait, bide his time, lie in hiding like a silent, watchful specter, ready to spring at the opportune moment. Brenlin knew in his own mind that he was right; that Hiller had been totally wrong in his quick assumption that Carter had committed suicide. On the other hand, possibly the good-natured inspector had been merely offering him a chance to accomplish something that would give him a boost in the department.

"That's all for the present, Jarvis," Brenlin said pleasantly enough. "When Mr. Lanier comes, show him in here. We'll be through in another hour."

"Very good, sir." The butler looked at Brenlin for a second very intently. Then he turned and walked across the room toward the door.

Brenlin watched his back as he went. The man did not turn, but opened the door and went out into the hall with his deliberate stride. The door closed after him.

Swiftly, Brenlin slipped the door key from his pocket and studied it for a second under the lamp-light. It was a large, bronze key of no particular distinction. He had an idea that this was not the original key, but only a duplicate.

He glanced sharply about the room. Then he took the thing from his pocket that he had fished out of the ashes in the grate. It was the stub of a cigarette—with a monogram that had been half burned away. He studied it for a long time, a perplexed frown furrowing his brow. This was the only bit of evidence he had to prove clearly to him that Carter had had a caller some time during the evening. The monogram on the cigarette had been burned so far off that it could not be made out. but the letter was Old English, and had been printed in pale-blue ink.

He placed the cigarette stub back in his pocket and hurried across the room to a small, flat-topped desk standing shadowed in one corner. He pulled open the top drawer and found within a heap of papers, and some old, dust egal documents. Hastily, cautiously, he went through them, but found nothing of any particular interest.

He was about to shove the drawer shut when of a sudden he caught sight of a small slip of torn paper. He picked it up quickly and glanced at it. The frown left his face; his eyes lighted eagerly.

Scrawled across the paper in a fine hand was a list of securities, a notation of the value of each, the year in which it matured, and the name of the broker that had issued the bonds; and at the bottom of the slip of paper Carter had signed his name.

Brenlin drew in his breath suddenly. From his pocket he jerked the note he had found upon Carter's table, at his very elbow, when first he had entered the room with Jarvis.

HE COMPARED the two signatures carefully. Then a grim smile settled over his face. He put the piece of paper with the figures upon it in his pocket quickly and whirled about, reaching for the gun in his pocket. That shadow, that strange, mysterious shadow he had seen upon the wall once before, suddenly darted before his vision. It appeared to be directly above him, right over the desk.

"Good God!" he uttered under his breath; "there's someone in this room somewhere!'' He stood motionless, listening, watching; but there was no sound save the moaning of the wind outside, and the rattle of the rain against the

windows. He slowly, cautiously turned his head and looked up at the spot on the wall above the desk. The shadow was gone!

Puzzled, perplexed, fascinated by that queer thing, he moved to the center of the room and stood for an instant breathless. He had a sudden desire to get out of the room for a few minutes. He looked at the windows; crossed to them; brushed the draperies aside and stared out into the blackness of the night. He shivered a little in spite of himself. There was some mystery here. No doubt of it.

Jimmie Brenlin was no coward. He had come up from the police ranks to his present position as a member of the homicide squad; but one thing he had learned early in the game— and that was never to take unnecessary chances.

He turned, with his back to the windows, his fingers grip]>ed around the butt of his gun, and looked at the desk in the far corner of the room. He raised his eyes to the wall above it. There was a tense moment. Then he relaxed and smiled a little.

The thing came to him in a flash. Over the fireplace, rather high up in the wall, was a small window with opaque glass i.i it. Presumably placed there for ornamental purposes, it went unnoticed by the casual observer. To Brenlin, however, standing staring up at it, it suddenly took on a new significance. He had noted it when he had first entered this room. There had been nothing unusual about it— but now there was a glow of light behind it!

He stood watching the window, fascinated. He saw a shadow cross it. Swiftly he glanced at the spot on the wall above the desk— and saw the faint, dark shadow of a hand and arm reflected upon the wall again.

What lay back of or beyond that window? Who was there, and for what purpose? These thoughts shot through his mind like a raging torrent. Brenlin was finding it difficult to preserve a balance now between curiosity and caution. The sheer mystery of this singular case startled him. It had all looked simple enough in the beginning.

The light behind the opaque window suddenly went out. Brenlin stepped forward almost involuntarily. His eyes swept the room with a quick, suspicious look. He found himself in a momentary state of bewilderment; but the bewilderment passed with the grim determination that leaped lightning-like into his mind. He was wasting time. The medical examiner would arrive at any moment now; only the storm had delayed him this long; and with his coming Brenlin would find himself checked to a certain extent

He leaped across the room and caught hold of the door that opened into the hall. He gave it a swift pull, and to his amazement he discovered that the door was either locked or stuck.

He put both hands upon the knob and pulled with all his strength, but the heavy door yielded not an inch. He stepped back, surveyed the door in a puzzled

manner for an instant; and as he stood watching it, the door swung open almost noiselessly, and Jarvis, the butler, stepped into the room.

"Young Mr. Lanier has arrived, sir," the man said suavely. "He just drove up. Shall I ask him to come in here, sir?"

Brenlin thought swiftly. He had no time to think of the astonishing manner in which the door had been locked.

"Send him in here," he said coolly, looking directly into the butler's eyes. He reached out and caught hold of the door so that the man could not close it after him. He stood there firmly rooted.

"Yes, sir." Jarvis turned and walked back into the dimness of the gloomy old hall. Brenlin heard the soft patter of his steps.

"THAT'S damned funny!" Brenlin muttered. He quickly made an examination of the lock, but found no key to the solution. He was convinced that the door had been locked. Another thing struck him as being most extraordinary. Lanier, Carter's cousin, had arrived in a singularly soundless manner. If he had driven up to the broad veranda overlooking the driveway, his car certainly would have made some noise, even above the swish of the wind and rain.

Brenlin suddenly began to think that he was being a fool, that he was taking unnecessary chances. He would be alone here in this ghastly, silent, mysterious old house with two men— both of whom might or might not have some connection with the murder, and both of whom might, in a tight place, prove exceedingly desperate and formidable opponents.

He heard the sound of voices in the hall, followed by the dull slam of a heavy door. He heard the sound of swiftly moving feet. He stepped back from the door a little.

Jarvis came through the door followed by a tall, rather dark man of no definite age. He might have been thirty, he might have been forty. He swept the butler aside and hurried across toward the body sprawled in the chair at the table. He raised the dead man's head with a cry, and gazed into his face.

"My God!" he uttered hoarsely. "He's often talked of it, Jarvis— but I never believed he'd actually do it." He moved back a step and placed his hands to his face. He seemed filled with some overwhelming emotion.

Brenlin stood silently watching the man. He noted that he was very well dressed. As he watched, the man spun about and looked at him suddenly.

Their eyes clashed. Brenlin surveyed him steadily, piercingly. He was conscious of a swift feeling of dislike, mistrust, sweeping over him. There was something furtive in the other's glance; his face was thin and hawklike, despite the fact that he was a very handsome man. His lips were thin and tight; there was a cruel twist to his mouth. Brenlin took all those details in with a single, searching look.

"You're from police headquarters?" Lanier asked in a sharp, guttural voice.

"Of the homicide squad," Brenlin replied gravely.

"Have you any reason to believe that my cousin was murdered?" Lanier questioned quickly, jerking his head around and staring in a horrified manner at the dead man.

"After a thorough investigation," Brenlin said coolly, "I've come to the conclusion that Mr. Carter committed suicide."

Lanier seemed to catch his breath quickly. He made a motion with one hand. He took off his soft hat and laid it upon the table; slipped from his raincoat, and passed it to Jarvis, who came across toward him swiftly and took the coat.

Brenlin noted that the man's hair was sleek and almost black. He wore a splendidly tailored sack-suit of dark brown. His hands were slim and white. He was, in every detail, the personification of a gentleman of leisure.

"What's to be done!" Lanier cried in a half-excited manner.

"There's nothing to be done until the medical examiner arrives and makes his report," Brenlin answered evenly. He felt that Lanier was surreptitiously trying to analyze hint.

"Because of my belief that Mr. Carter committed suicide," Brenlin went on slowly, "I have placed no restraining order upon anyone's coming in or going out of this house." He shot a quick look at Lanier to see what effect his words might have; but the man was bending over Carter and muttering unintelligible words.

Brenlin looked at Jarvis. He was standing back out of the glow of light from the lamp.

"You may leave the room, Jarvis," Brenlin said. "I want to ask Mr. Lanier some questions."

"That isn't necessary. It isn't necessary at all," Lanier cut in suddenly, straightening up and casting a furtive glance at Brenlin. "Jarvis has been with poor old Carter for more than ten years. I think he lias a right to remain in this room."

"Leave the room, Jarvis!" Brenlin said sharply.

THE butler glanced at Brenlin; then he looked at Lanier. Brenlin had the feeling that a singular sort of look had been exchanged by the two men.

Lanier shrugged his shoulders. There was a curious sort of expression upon his face, but he said nothing.

"If you need me, sir, just step to the door and call," Jarvis said, with a certain signifiance that was not lost upon Brenlin, who was watching him closely. The butler made his way across the room and opened the door. Brenlin, still watching him, thought that he saw the man's hand slip down toward the lock of the door. He waited for the servant to make his exit into the hall; then he walked across to the door, slipped the bronze key from his own pocket and

carefully inserted it into the lock and turned it over. He then took out his pen-knife and wedged the blade of it in with the key.

He swung around on his heel to find Lanier looking at him with eyes that were a trifle too bright. The man's mouth was twisted into a half-crooked smile.

"You fellows from police headquarters take a lot of liberties," he said harshly. "Why are you locking that door?"

Brenlin shoved his hand into his pocket and closed his fingers over the automatic. He moved back toward Lanier with a faint smile.

"So we won't be disturbed while we're talking, Mr. Lanier," he said quietly. "Will you sit down?"

"No— I'll stand, if it's all the same to you." There was an ugly note in the man's voice.

Brenlin merely inclined his head in slight acknowledgement, There was a grim resolution, a definite plan of action, now mapped out in his mind. He was almost certain of his ground.

He took hold of a small chair and dragged it across, close to the table, sat down astride it; felt through his pockets, as if in search of something.

"I understand that you're related to Mr. Carter," Brenlin began in a mild, casual tone.

"I'm his cousin," Lanier responded acidly. "I'll take charge of the house and the details of the funeral— when you fellows get through meddling."

"You understand, it's only our duty to investigate these things," Brenlin said with a smile. "We don't do it from choice. When did you see Mr. Carter alive last?"

"Two weeks ago," Lanier replied shortly. He looked at Brenlin in a sort of contemptuous manner. Then he turned and laid one hand upon the dead man's shoulder. "Must you keep him here all night?"

"He must he left precisely as he was found until the medical examiner arrives," Bemlin answered gravely. He began a slow, methodical search through his pockets again. "It's too damned bad I have to sit out here without anything to smoke, he remarked, with a slight gesture.

"What do you want— a cigarette?" Lanier snapped.

"I'd walk a mile for one," Brenlin said humorously.

"I wish to God you would— and get out of here— leave me alone with him." Lanier put his hand into his pocket with a quick, nervous movement and took out a gold cigarette case. "Here— I'll supply you with something to smoke if that'll speed you along."

"Thanks." Brenlin rose and reached for one of the white tubes in the open case. He withdrew it in a seemingly imperturable manner and placed it in his mouth; but his blood was coursing through his brain at fever heat. With one swift glance he had seen the Old English letter— the pale-blue monogram.

"Now tell me you need matches!" Lanier fairly snarled.

"That's one thing I have plenty of." Brenlin struck a match and touched the flame to the tip of the cigarette. Then with a sudden amazing swiftness and dexterity, he leaped from his chair again and reached out, his fingers closed over the wrist of Lanier. The man uttered a sharp,' startled cry.

"What are you doing!" he snarled hoarsely.

"Lanier," Brenlin said in a low, tense voice, "you're a liar. You were in this room tonight!"

"WHO said so?" Lanier cried, trying to break the other's grip upon his wrist. "Take your hand away before I—" With his free hand, he reached over and seized the automatic pistol lying on the table, but Brenlin was too quick for him. He brought his clenched fist down upon the man's arm in a crushing blow; the revolver was jerked from the other's hand and went spinning across the rug.

"Never mind that!" Brenlin shot out; "and remember that I've got you covered with this hand in my pocket. Sit down!" He whirled Lanier around and shoved him into the chair.

"Damn you!" the man snarled. "What are you up to?"

"You're the one who knows the most about Carter's death," Brenlin said in a level tone. "Whether you are or are not his cousin is beside the point; but you were in this room with him tonight."

"That's a lie!" Lanier half rose from the chair and settled back again with a hoarse laugh. "Oh, well, go on— you fellows have to go through all this third degree stuff to earn your salary."

"Exactly." Brenlin smiled grimly. He took the burning cigarette from his mouth and held it out before the eyes of the man in the chair.

"This cigarette and this monogram," he said quietly, "are precisely like one I found in the ashes of the grate there. You put it there— tonight."

Lanier laughed. He shrugged his shoulder and made a contemptuous gesture with one slim hand.

"That's funny," he said sarcastically.

"So far, so good," Brenlin went on in a quiet, conversational tone. "On your finger is a large seal ring—" he backed away a little and slipped the gun from his pocket and held it in a convenient position. "Now, up there—" he pointed to the opaque window high above the fireplace, "is a window. What's behind it, I don't know. Possibly some sort of small room or closet."

"To hell with you!" Lanier leaped to his feet with a stifled snarl of rage.

"Don't get nervous," Brenlin smiled. "Remember, I am the law— and it is only necessary for me to pull the trigger to protect myself. Lanier, you didn't drive up to this house since I've been here. You've been in it all evening— ever since Carter was killed. You were careless enough to switch on a light up there

back of that window. You can see for yourself that the lamp-light in this room is very dim, almost shadowy. The reflection of your hand, the shadow, was thrown upon the wall over there above that desk. I know it was your hand, for I noted the slight elevation upon the finger that has the ring around it. Naturally, it showed in the shadow. Now wait just a minute— " he snatched up the automatic from the floor and shoved it into his pocket; he hurried across the room; with a single, swift movement he slipped the pen-knife and key from the lock and jerked the door open.

"Come in, Jarvis!"

He shoved the gun into the pit of the butler's stomach and caught him by the back of the neck; he fairly hurled the man into the room. Before the servant could get his breath, Brenlin had frisked him and discovered that he was unarmed.

"Keep your mouth closed, Jarvis!" Lanier snarled. This fellow is crazy!"

Without a word, Brenlin seized Jarvis by the wrist, shot one hand into his inner pocket, while he held the gun against his breast. He brought his hand away with a long, bulky envelope in it.

With a startled cry of rage and consternation, Jarvis tried to strike the gun down; and simultaneously with the movement, Lanier leaped across the room.

BRENLIN had been watching him out of the corner of his eye. He sidestepped and half swung around. "Boys!" he said grimly. "Stand still or you're both dead men." He ran across the room, going around on the other side of the table. He ripped open the bulky envelope with one hand; tossed the contents out; took a single glance at them; and looked into the faces of the two men before him. At that precise moment there came the faint sound of a running motor off in the driveway.

"Confederates, co-workers, you two," Brenlin uttered triumphantly. "This is one of those cases that has worked backward. I got the result before I got the motive, which is still very vague, Lanier. Only this: you shot Carter at close range with this German automatic. You placed him in that chair and scrawled the note yourself. You didn't do a very good job of handwriting, when it came to matching up. Carter had these bonds in his possession— that's what you were after. Don't move!"

"Damn you!" Lanier, beating his hands together in a paroxysm of fear and rage. "How'd you find all that out?"

"Your motive in murdering Carter was to gain possession of these bonds. Possibly you had a fight over them. Mere details that will come out later. It was a pretty slick job all the way round, but you boys never learn that the slightest clue always starts a train of thought in a detective's mind. In this instance, it was the half-burned blue monogram on one of your cigarettes— "

The door across the room was shoved in suddenly. Jarvis whirled around with a suppressed cry. His face was pasty white.

"I told you it was dangerous, Mr. Lanier!" he cried huskily. "I didn't want to do it— I didn't want to do it— not even for the money that was in it; but they'll never send me to the chair for it. You killed him! I heard the fight— I heard the shot— I helped you put him in the chair. My God! Now they'll send us both to prison!"

Brenlin lowered the gun he held in his hand with a faint smile. Hiller was standing framed in the doorway in his dripping raincoat, and right back of him was the medical inspector.

"Attaboy!" Hiller boomed, stepping into the room. "I knew damn well you had it in you, kid; but you got a lucky break at that. Step in, Doc— it's all over but the irons and a couple of shots of juice for these birds. Say, my boys are trained to see clues in the dark!" he chuckled.

"Did you know Carter had been murdered?" Brenlin gasped as he reached automatically into his pocket and took out a pair of handcuffs.

"Sure," Hiller laughed, slipping a second pair of manacles from his raincoat pocket. "I picked up a gold pencil under the table there with an 'L' monogrammed on it."

3: Pirates

E. F. Benson

1867-1940

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FOR MANY YEARS this project of sometime buying back the house had simmered in Peter Graham's mind, but whenever he actually went into the idea with practical intention, stubborn reasons had presented themselves to deter him. In the first place it was very far off from his work, down in the heart of Cornwall, and it would be impossible to think of going there just for week-ends, and if he established himself there for longer periods what on earth would he do with himself in that soft remote Lotus-land? He was a busy man who, when at work, liked the diversion of his club and of the theatres in the evening, but he allowed himself few holidays away from the City, and those were spent on salmon river or golf links with some small party of solid and like-minded friends. Looked at in these lights, the project bristled with objections.

Yet through all these years, forty of them now, which had ticked away so imperceptibly, the desire to be at home again at Lescop had always persisted, and from time to time it gave him shrewd little unexpected tugs, when his conscious mind was in no way concerned with it. This desire, he was well aware, was of a sentimental quality, and often he wondered at himself that he, who was so well-armoured in the general jostle of the world against that type of emotion, should have just this one joint in his harness. Not since he was sixteen had he set eyes on the place, but the memory of it was more vivid than that of any other scene of subsequent experience. He had married since then, he had lost his wife, and though for many months after that he had felt horribly lonely, the ache of that loneliness had ceased, and now, if he had ever asked himself the direct question, he would have confessed that bachelor existence was more suited to him than married life had ever been. It had not been a conspicuous success, and he never felt the least temptation to repeat the experiment.

But there was another loneliness which neither married life nor his keen interest in his business had ever extinguished, and this was directly connected with his desire for that house on the green slope of the hills above Truro. For only seven years had he lived there, the youngest but one of a family of five children, and now out of all that gay company he alone was left. One by one they had dropped off the stem of life, but as each in turn went into this silence, Peter had not missed them very much: his own life was too occupied to give him time really to miss anybody, and he was too vitally constituted to do otherwise than look forwards.

None of that brood of children except himself, and he childless, had married, and now when he was left without intimate tie of blood to any living being, a loneliness had gathered thickly round him. It was not in any sense a tragic or desperate loneliness: he had no wish to follow them on the unverified and unlikely chance of finding them all again. Also, he had no use for any disembodied existence: life meant to him flesh and blood and material interests and activities, and he could form no conception of life apart from such. But sometimes he ached with this dull gnawing ache of loneliness, which is worse than all others, when he thought of the stillness that lay congealed like clear ice over these young and joyful years when Lescop had been so noisy and alert and full of laughter, with its garden resounding with games, and the house with charades and hide-and-seek and multitudinous plans. Of course there had been rows and quarrels and disgraces, hot enough at the time, but now there was no one to quarrel with. "You can't really quarrel with people whom you don't love," thought Peter, "because they don't matter...." Yet it was ridiculous to feel lonely; it was even more than ridiculous, it was weak, and Peter had the kindly contempt of a successful and healthy and unemotional man for weaknesses of that kind. There were so many amusing and interesting things in the world, he had so many irons in the fire to be beaten, so to speak, into gold when he was working, and so many palatable diversions when he was not (for he still brought a boyish enthusiasm to work and play alike), that there was no excuse for indulging in sentimental sterilities. So, for months together, hardly a stray thought would drift towards the remote years lived in the house on the hill-side above Truro.

He had lately become chairman of the board of that new and highly promising company, the British Tin Syndicate. Their property included certain Cornish mines which had been previously abandoned as non-paying propositions, but a clever mineralogical chemist had recently invented a process by which the metal could be extracted far more cheaply than had hitherto been possible. The British Tin Syndicate had bought the patent, and having acquired these derelict Cornish mines was getting very good results from ore that had not been worth treating. Peter had very strong opinions as to the duty of a chairman to make himself familiar with the practical side of his concerns, and was now travelling down to Cornwall to make a personal inspection of the mines where this process was at work. He had with him certain technical reports which he had received to read during the uninterrupted hours of his journey, and it was not till his train had left Exeter behind that he finished his perusal of them, and, putting them back in his despatch-case, turned his eye at the swiftly passing panorama of travel. It was many years since he had been to the West Country, and now with the thrill of vivid recognition he found the red cliffs round Dawlish, interspersed between stretches of sunny sea-beach, startlingly familiar.

Surely he must have seen them quite lately, he thought to himself, and then, ransacking his memory, he found it was forty years since he had looked at them, travelling back to Eton from his last holidays at Lescop. The intense sharp-cut impressions of youth!

His destination to-night was Penzance, and now, with a strangely keen sense of expectation, he remembered that just before reaching Truro station the house on the hill was visible from the train, for often on these journeys to and from school he had been all eyes to catch the first sight of it and the last. Trees perhaps would have grown up and intervened, but as they ran past the station before Truro he shifted across to the other side of the carriage, and once more looked out for that glimpse.... There it was, a mile away across the valley, with its grey stone front and the big beech-tree screening one end of it, and his heart leaped as he saw it. Yet what use was the house to him now? It was not the stones and the bricks of it, nor the tall hay-fields below it, nor the tangled garden behind that he wanted, but the days when he had lived in it. Yet he leaned from the window till a cutting extinguished the view of it, feeling that he was looking at a photograph that recalled some living presence. All those who had made Lescop dear and still vivid had gone, but this record remained, like the image on the plate.... And then he smiled at himself with a touch of contempt for his sentimentality.

The next three days were a whirl of enjoyable occupation: tin-mines in the concrete were new to Peter, and he absorbed himself in these, as in some new game or ingenious puzzle. He went down the shafts of mines which had been opened again, he inspected the new chemical process, seeing it at work and checking the results, he looked into running expenses, comparing them with the value of the metal recovered. Then, too, there was substantial traces of silver in some of these ores, and he went eagerly into the question as to whether it would pay to extract it. Certainly even the mines which had previously been closed down ought to yield a decent dividend with this process, while those where the lode was richer would vastly increase their profits. But economy, economy.... Surely it would save in the end, though at a considerable capital expenditure now, to lay a light railway from the works to the rail-head instead of employing these motor-lorries. There was a piece of steep gradient, it was true, but a small detour, with a trestle-bridge over the stream, would avoid that.

He walked over the proposed route with the engineer and scrambled about the stream-bank to find a good take-off for his trestle-bridge. And all the time at the back of his head, in some almost subconscious region of thought, were passing endless pictures of the house and the hill, its rooms and passages, its fields and garden, and with them, like some accompanying tune, ran that ache of loneliness. He felt that he must prowl again about the place: the owner, no doubt, if he presented himself, would let him just stroll about alone for half an

hour. Thus he would see it all altered and overscored by the life of strangers living there, and the photograph would fade into a mere blur and then blankness. Much better that it should.

It was in this intention that, having explored every avenue for dividends on behalf of his company, he left Penzance by an early morning train in order to spend a few hours in Truro and go up to London later in the day. Hardly had he emerged from the station when a crowd of memories, forty years old, but more vivid than any of those of the last day or two, flocked round him with welcome for his return. There was the level-crossing and the road leading down to the stream where his sister Sybil and he had caught a stickleback for their aquarium, and across the bridge over it was the lane sunk deep between high crumbling banks that led to a footpath across the fields to Lescop. He knew exactly where was that pool with long ribands of water-weed trailing and waving in it, which had yielded them that remarkable fish: he knew how campions red and white would be in flower on the lane-side, and in the fields the meadow-orchis. But it was more convenient to go first into the town, get his lunch at the hotel, and to make enquiries from a house-agent as to the present owner of Lescop; perhaps he would walk back to the station for his afternoon train by that short cut.

Thick now as flowers on the steppe when spring comes, memories bright and fragrant shot up round him. There was the shop where he had taken his canary to be stuffed (beautiful it looked!): and there was the shop of the "undertaker and cabinet-maker," still with the same name over the door, where on a memorable birthday, on which his amiable family had given him, by request, the tokens of their good-will in cash, he had ordered a cabinet with five drawers and two trays, varnished and smelling of newly cut wood, for his collection of shells.... There was a small boy in jersey and flannel trousers looking in at the window now, and Peter suddenly said to himself, "Good Lord, how like I used to be to that boy: same kit, too." Strikingly like indeed he was, and Peter, curiously interested, started to cross the street to get a nearer look at him. But it was market-day, a drove of sheep delayed him, and when he got across the small boy had vanished among the passengers. Farther along was a dignified house-front with a flight of broad steps leading up to it, once the dreaded abode of Mr. Tuck, dentist. There was a tall girl standing outside it now, and again Peter involuntarily said to himself, "Why, that girl's wonderfully like Sybil!" But before he could get more than a glimpse of her, the door was opened and she passed in, and Peter was rather vexed to find that there was no longer a plate on the door indicating that Mr. Tuck was still at his wheel.... At the end of the street was the bridge over the Fal just below which they used so often to take a boat for a picnic on the river. There was a jolly family party setting off just now from the quay, three boys, he noticed, and a couple of girls, and a woman

of young middle-age. Quickly they dropped downstream and went forth, and with half a sigh he said to himself, "Just our number with Mamma."

He went to the Red Lion for his lunch: that was new ground and uninteresting, for he could not recall having set foot in that hostelry before. But as he munched his cold beef there was some great fantastic business going on deep down in his brain: it was trying to join up (and it believed it could) that boy outside the cabinet-maker's, that girl on the threshold of the house once Mr. Tuck's, and that family party starting for their picnic on the river. It was in vain that he told himself that neither the boy nor the girl nor the picnic-party could possibly have anything to do with him: as soon as his attention relaxed that burrowing underground chase, as of a ferret in a rabbit-hole, began again.... And then Peter gave a gasp of sheer amazement, for he remembered with clear-cut distinctness how on the morning of that memorable birthday, he and Sybil started earlier than the rest from Lescop, he on the adorable errand of ordering his cabinet, she for a dolorous visit to Mr. Tuck. The others followed half an hour later for a picnic on the Fal to celebrate the great fact that his age now required two figures (though one was a nought) for expression. "It'll be ninety years, darling," his mother had said, "before you want a third one, so be careful of yourself."

Peter was almost as excited when this momentous memory burst on him as he had been on the day itself. Not that it meant anything, he said to himself, as there's nothing for it to mean. But I call it odd. It's as if something from those days hung about here still....

He finished his lunch quickly after that, and went to the house agent's to make his enquiries. Nothing could be easier than that he should prowl about Lescop, for the house had been untenanted for the last two years. No card "to view" was necessary, but here were the keys: there was no caretaker there.

"But the house will be going to rack and ruins," said Peter indignantly. "Such a jolly house, too. False economy not to put a caretaker in. But of course it's no business of mine. You shall have the keys back during the afternoon: I'll walk up there now."

"Better take a taxi, sir," said the man. "A hot day, and a mile and a half up a steep hill."

"Oh, nonsense," said Peter. "Barely a mile. Why, my brother and I used often to do it in ten minutes."

It occurred to him that these athletic feats of forty years ago would probably not interest the modern world....

Pyder Street was as populous with small children as ever, and perhaps a little longer and steeper than it used to be. Then turning off to the right among strange new-built suburban villas he passed into the well-known lane, and in five minutes more had come to the gate leading into the short drive up to the house.

It drooped on its hinges, he must lift it off the latch, sidle through and prop it in place again. Overgrown with grass and weeds was the drive, and with another spurt of indignation he saw that the stile to the pathway across the field was broken down and had dragged the wires of the fence with it. And then he came to the house itself, and the creepers trailed over the windows, and, unlocking the door, he stood in the hall with its discoloured ceiling and patches of mildew growing on the damp walls. Shabby and ashamed it looked, the paint perished from the window-sashes, the panes dirty, and in the air the sour smell of chambers long unventilated. And yet the spirit of the house was there still, though melancholy and reproachful, and it followed him wearily from room to room— "You are Peter, aren't you?" it seemed to say. "You've just come to look at me, I see and not to stop. But I remember the jolly days just as well as you...." From room to room he went, dining-room, drawing-room, his mother's sitting-room, his father's study: then upstairs to what had been the school-room in the days of governesses, and had then been turned over to the children for a play-room. Along the passage was the old nursery and the night-nursery, and above that attic-rooms, to one of which, as his own exclusive bedroom, he had been promoted when he went to school. The roof of it had leaked, there was a brown-edged stain on the sagging ceiling just above where his bed had been. "A nice state to let my room get into," muttered Peter. "How am I to sleep underneath that drip from the roof? Too bad!"

The vividness of his own indignation rather startled him. He had really felt himself to be not a dual personality, but the same Peter Graham at different periods of his existence. One of them, the chairman of the British Tin Syndicate, had protested against young Peter Graham being put to sleep in so damp and dripping a room, and the other (oh, the ecstatic momentary glimpse of him!) was indeed young Peter back in his lovely attic again, just home from school and now looking round with eager eyes to convince himself of that blissful reality, before bouncing downstairs again to have tea in the children's room. What a lot of things to ask about! How were his rabbits, and how were Sybil's guinea-pigs, and had Violet learned that song "Oh 'tis nothing but a shower," and were the wood-pigeons building again in the lime-tree? All these topics were of the first importance....

Peter Graham the elder sat down on the window-seat. It overlooked the lawn, and just opposite was the lime-tree, a drooping lime making a green cave inside the skirt of its lower branches, but with those above growing straight, and he heard the chuckling coo of the wood-pigeons coming from it. They were building there again then: that question of young Peter's was answered.

"Very odd that I should just be thinking of that," he said to himself: somehow there was no gap of years between him and young Peter, for his attic

bridged over the decades which in the clumsy material reckoning of time intervened between them. Then Peter the elder seemed to take charge again.

The house was a sad affair, he thought: it gave him a stab of loneliness to see how decayed was the theatre of their joyful years, and no evidence of newer life, of the children of strangers and even of their children's children growing up here could have overscored the old sense of it so effectually. He went out of young Peter's room and paused on the landing: the stairs led down in two short flights to the story below, and now for the moment he was young Peter again, reaching down with his hand along the banisters, and preparing to take the first flight in one leap. But then old Peter saw it was an impossible feat for his less supple joints.

Well, there was the garden to explore, and then he would go back to the agent's and return the keys. He no longer wanted to take that short cut down the steep hill to the station, passing the pool where Sybil and he had caught the stickleback, for his whole notion, sometimes so urgent, of coming back here, had wilted and withered. But he would just walk about the garden for ten minutes, and as he went with sedate step downstairs, memories of the garden, and of what they all did there began to invade him. There were trees to be climbed, and shrubberies— one thicket of syringa particularly where goldfinches built— to be searched for nests and moths, but above all there was that game they played there, far more exciting than lawn-tennis or cricket in the bumpy field (though that was exciting enough) called Pirates.... There was a summer-house, tiled and roofed and of solid walls at the top of the garden, and that was 'home' or 'Plymouth Sound,' and from there ships (children that is) set forth at the order of the Admiral to pick a trophy without being caught by the Pirates. There were two Pirates who hid anywhere in the garden and jumped out, and (counting the Admiral who, after giving his orders, became the flagship) three ships, which had to cruise to orchard or flower-bed or field and bring safely home a trophy culled from the ordained spot. Once, Peter remembered, he was flying up the winding path to the summer-house with a pirate close on his heels, when he fell flat down, and the humane pirate leaped over him for fear of treading on him, and fell down too. So Peter got home, because Dick had fallen on his face and his nose was bleeding....

"Good Lord, it might have happened yesterday," thought Peter. "And Harry called him a bloody pirate, and Papa heard and thought he was using shocking language till it was explained to him."

THE GARDEN was even worse than the house, neglected utterly and rankly overgrown, and to find the winding path at all, Peter had to push through briar and thicket. But he persevered and came out into the rose-garden at the top,

and there was Plymouth Sound with roof collapsed and walls bulging, and moss growing thick between the tiles of the floor.

"But it must be repaired at once," said Peter aloud.... "What's that?" He whisked round towards the bushes through which he had pushed his way, for he had heard a voice, faint and far off coming from there, and the voice was familiar to him, though for thirty years it had been dumb. For it was Violet's voice which had spoken and she had said, "Oh, Peter: *here* you are!"

He knew it was her voice, and he knew the utter impossibility of it. But it frightened him, and yet how absurd it was to be frightened, for it was only his imagination, kindled by old sights and memories, that had played him a trick. Indeed, how jolly even to have imagined that he had heard Violet's voice again.

"Vi!" he called aloud, but of course no one answered. The wood-pigeons were cooing in the lime, there was a hum of bees and a whisper of wind in the trees, and all round the soft enchanted Cornish air, laden with dream-stuff.

He sat down on the step of the summer-house, and demanded the presence of his own common sense. It had been an uncomfortable afternoon, he was vexed at this ruin of neglect into which the place had fallen, and he did not want to imagine these voices calling to him out of the past, or to see these odd glimpses which belonged to his boyhood. He did not belong any more to that epoch over which grasses waved and headstones presided, and he must be quit of all that evoked it, for, more than anything else, he was director of prosperous companies with big interests dependent on him. So he sat there for a calming five minutes, defying Violet, so to speak, to call to him again. And then, so unstable was his mood to-day, that presently he was listening for her. But Violet was always quick to see when she was not wanted, and she must have gone, to join the others....

He retraced his way, fixing his mind on material environments. The golden maple at the head of the walk, a sapling like himself when last he saw it, had become a stout-trunked tree, the shrub of bay a tall column of fragrant leaf, and just as he passed the syringa, a goldfinch dropped out of it with dipping flight. Then he was back at the house again where the climbing fuchsia trailed its sprays across the window of his mother's room and hot thick scent (how well-remembered!) spilled from the chalices of the great magnolia.

"A mad notion of mine to come and see the house again," he said to himself. "I won't think about it any more: it's finished. But it was wicked not to look after it."

He went back into the town to return the keys to the house-agent.

"Much obliged to you," he said. "A pleasant house, when I knew it years ago. Why was it allowed to go to ruin like that?"

"Can't say, sir," said the man. "It has been let once or twice in the last ten years, but the tenants have never stopped long. The owner would be very pleased to sell it."

An idea, fanciful, absurd, suddenly struck Peter.

"But why doesn't he live there?" he asked. "Or why don't the tenants stop long? Was there something they didn't like about it? Haunted: anything of that sort? I'm not going to take it or purchase it: so that won't put me off."

The man hesitated a moment.

"Well, there were stories," he said, "if I may speak confidentially. But all nonsense, of course."

"Quite so," said Peter. "You and I don't believe in such rubbish. I wonder now: was it said that children's voices were heard calling in the garden?"

The discretion of a house-agent reasserted itself.

"I can't say, sir, I'm sure," he said. "All I know is that the house is to be had very cheap. Perhaps you would take our card."

Peter arrived back in London late that night. There was a tray of sandwiches and drinks waiting for him, and having refreshed himself, he sat smoking awhile thinking of his three days' work in Cornwall at the mines: there must be a directors' meeting as soon as possible to consider his suggestions.... Then he found himself staring at the round rosewood table where his tray stood. It had been in his mother's sitting-room at Lescop, and the chair in which he sat, a fine Stuart piece, had been his father's chair at the dinner-table, and that book-case had stood in the hall, and his Chippendale card-table ... he could not remember exactly where that had been. That set of Browning's poems had been Sybil's: it was from the shelves in the children's room. But it was time to go to bed, and he was glad he was not to sleep in young Peter's attic.

It is doubtful whether, if once an idea has really thrown out roots in a man's mind, he can ever extirpate it. He can cut off its sprouting suckers, he can nip off the buds it bears, or, if they come to maturity, destroy the seed, but the roots defy him. If he tugs at them something breaks, leaving a vital part still embedded, and it is not long before some fresh evidence of its vitality pushes up above the ground where he least expected it. It was so with Peter now: in the middle of some business-meeting, the face of one of his co-directors reminded him of that of the coachman at Lescop; if he went for a week-end of golf to the Dormy House at Rye, the bow-window of the billiard-room was in shape and size that of the drawing-room there, and the bank of gorse by the tenth green was no other than the clump below the tennis-court: almost he expected to find a tennis ball there when he had need to search it. Whatever he did, wherever he went, something called him from Lescop, and in the evening when he returned home, there was the furniture, more of it than he had realized, asking to be restored there: rugs and pictures and books, the silver on his table all joined in

the mute appeal. But Peter stopped his ears to it: it was a senseless sentimentality, and a purely materialistic one to imagine that he could recapture the life over which so many years had flowed, and in which none of the actors but himself remained, by restoring to the house its old amenities and living there again. He would only emphasize his own loneliness by the visible contrast of the scene, once so alert and populous, with its present emptiness. And this "butting-in" (so he expressed it) of materialistic sentimentality only confirmed his resolve to have done with Lescop. It had been a bitter sight but tonic, and now he would forget it.

Yet even as he sealed his resolution, there would come to him, blown as a careless breeze from the west, the memory of that boy and girl he had seen in the town, of the gay family starting for their river-picnic, of the faint welcoming call to him from the bushes in the garden, and, most of all, of the suspicion that the place was supposed to be haunted. It was just because it was haunted that he longed for it, and the more savagely and sensibly he assured himself of the folly of possessing it, the more he yearned after it, and constantly now it coloured his dreams. They were happy dreams; he was back there with the others, as in old days, children again in holiday time, and like himself they loved being at home there again, and they made much of Peter because it was he who had arranged it all. Often in these dreams he said to himself 'I have dreamed this before, and then I woke and found myself elderly and lonely again, but this time it is real!'

The weeks passed on, busy and prosperous, growing into months, and one day in the autumn, on coming home from a day's golf, Peter fainted. He had not felt very well for some time, he had been languid and easily fatigued, but with his robust habit of mind he had labelled such symptoms as mere laziness, and had driven himself with the whip. But now it might be as well to get a medical overhauling just for the satisfaction of being told there was nothing the matter with him. The pronouncement was not quite that....

"But I simply can't," he said. "Bed for a month and a winter of loafing on the Riviera! Why, I've got my time filled up till close on Christmas, and then I've arranged to go with some friends for a short holiday. Besides, the Riviera's a pestilent hole. It can't be done. Supposing I go on just as usual: what will happen?"

Dr. Dufflin made a mental summary of his wilful patient.

"You'll die, Mr. Graham," he said cheerfully. "Your heart is not what it should be, and if you want it to do its work, which it will for many years yet, if you're sensible, you must give it rest. Of course, I don't insist on the Riviera: that was only a suggestion for I thought you would probably have friends there, who would help to pass the time for you. But I do insist on some mild climate, where you can loaf out of doors. London with its frosts and fogs would never do."

Peter was silent for a moment.

"How about Cornwall?" he asked.

"Yes, if you like. Not the north coast of course."

"I'll think it over," said Peter. "There's a month yet."

Peter knew that there was no need for thinking it over. Events were conspiring irresistibly to drive him to that which he longed to do, but against which he had been struggling, so fantastic was it, so irrational. But now it was made easy for him to yield and his obstinate colours came down with a run. A few telegraphic exchanges with the house-agent made Lescop his, another gave him the address of a reliable builder and decorator, and with the plans of the house, though indeed there was little need of them, spread out on his counterpane, Peter issued urgent orders. All structural repairs, leaking roofs and dripping ceilings, rotted woodwork and crumbling plaster must be tackled at once, and when that was done, painting and papering followed. The drawing-room used to have a Morris-paper; there were spring flowers on it, blackthorn, violets, and fritillaries, a hateful wriggling paper, so he thought it, but none other would serve. The hall was painted duck-egg green, and his mother's room was pink, "a beastly pink, tell them," said Peter to his secretary, "with a bit of blue in it: they must send me sample by return of post, big pieces, not snippets...." Then there was furniture: all the furniture in the house here which had once been at Lescop must go back there. For the rest, he would send down some stuff from London, bedroom appurtenances, and linen and kitchen utensils: he would see to carpets when he got there. Spare bedrooms could wait; just four servants' rooms must be furnished, and also the attic which he had marked on the plan, and which he intended to occupy himself. But no one must touch the garden till he came: he would superintend that himself, but by the middle of next month there must be a couple of gardeners ready for him.

"And that's all," said Peter, "just for the present." "All?" he thought, as, rather bored with the direction of matters that usually ran themselves, he folded up his plans. "Why, it's just the beginning: just underwriting."

THE MONTH'S REST-CURE was pronounced a success, and with strict orders not to exert mind or body, but to lie fallow, out of doors whenever possible, with quiet strolls and copious restings, Peter was allowed to go to Lescop, and on a December evening he saw the door opened to him and the light of welcome stream out on to his entry. The moment he set foot inside he knew, as by some interior sense, that he had done right, for it was not only the warmth and the ordered comfort restored to the deserted house that greeted him, but the firm knowledge that they whose loss made his loneliness were greeting him.... That came in a flash, fantastic and yet soberly convincing; it was fundamental, everything was based on it. The house had been restored to its old

aspect, and though he had ventured to turn the small attic next door to young Peter's bedroom into a bathroom, "after all," he thought, "it's my house, and I must make myself comfortable. They don't want bathrooms, but I do, and there it is." There indeed it was, and there was electric light installed, and he dined, sitting in his father's chair, and then pottered from room to room, drinking in the old friendly atmosphere, which was round him wherever he went, for They were pleased. But neither voice nor vision manifested that, and perhaps it was only his own pleasure at being back that he attributed to them. But he would have loved a glimpse or a whisper, and from time to time, as he sat looking over some memoranda about the British Tin Syndicate, he peered into corners of the room, thinking that something moved there, and when a trail of creeper tapped against the window he got up and looked out. But nothing met his scrutiny but the dim starlight falling like dew on the neglected lawn. "They're here, though," he said to himself, as he let the curtain fall back.

The gardeners were ready for him next morning, and under his directions began the taming of the jungly wildness. And here was a pleasant thing, for one of them was the son of the cowman, Calloway, who had been here forty years ago, and he had childish memories still of the garden where with his father he used to come from the milking-shed to the house with the full pails. And he remembered that Sybil used to keep her guinea-pigs on the drying-ground at the back of the house. Now that he said that Peter remembered it too, and so the drying-ground all overgrown with brambles and rank herbage must be cleared.

"Iss, sure, nasty little vermin I thought them," said Calloway the younger, "but 'twas here Miss Sybil had their hutches and a wired run for 'em. And a rare fuss there was when my father's terrier got in and killed half of 'em, and the young lady crying over the corpses."

That massacre of the innocents was dim to Peter; it must have happened in term-time when he was at school, and by the next holidays, to be sure, the prolific habits of her pets had gladdened Sybil's mourning.

So the drying-ground was cleared and the winding path up the shrubbery to the summer-house which had been home to the distressed vessels pursued by pirates. This was being rebuilt now, the roof timbered up, the walls rectified and whitewashed, and the steps leading to it and its tiled floor cleaned of the encroaching moss. It was soon finished, and Peter often sat there to rest and read the papers after a morning of prowling and supervising in the garden, for an hour or two on his feet oddly tired him, and he would doze in the sunny shelter. But now he never dreamed about coming back to Lescop or of the welcoming presences. "Perhaps that's because I've come," he thought, "and those dreams were only meant to drive me. But I think they might show that they're pleased: I'm doing all I can."

Yet he knew they were pleased, for as the work in the garden progressed, the sense of them and their delight hung about the cleared paths as surely as the smell of the damp earth and the uprooted bracken which had made such trespass. Every evening Calloway collected the gleanings of the day, piling it on the bonfire in the orchard. The bracken flared, and the damp hazel stems fizzed and broke into flame, and the scent of the wood smoke drifted across to the house. And after some three weeks' work all was done, and that afternoon Peter took no siesta in the summer-house, for he could not cease from walking through flower-garden and kitchen-garden and orchard now perfectly restored to their old order. A shower fell, and he sheltered under the lime where the pigeons built, and then the sun came out again, and in that gleam at the close of the winter day he took a final stroll to the bottom of the drive, where the gate now hung firm on even hinges. It used to take a long time in closing, if, as a boy, you let it swing, penduluming backwards and forwards with the latch of it clicking as it passed the hasp: and now he pulled it wide, and let go of it, and to and fro it went in lessening movement till at last it clicked and stayed. Somehow that pleased him immensely: he liked accuracy in details.

But there was no doubt he was very tired: he had an unpleasant sensation, too, as of a wire stretched tight across his heart, and of some thrumming going on against it. The wire dully ached, and this thrumming produced little stabs of sharp pain. All day he had been conscious of something of the sort, but he was too much taken up with the joy of the finished garden to heed little physical beckonings. A good long night would make him fit again, or, if not, he could stop in bed to-morrow. He went upstairs early, not the least anxious about himself, and instantly went to sleep. The soft night air pushed in at his open window, and the last sound that he heard was the tapping of the blind-tassel against the sash.

He woke very suddenly and completely, knowing that somebody had called him. The room was curiously bright, but not with the quality of moonlight; it was like a valley lying in shadow, while somewhere, a little way above it, shone some strong splendour of noon. And then he heard again his name called, and knew that the sound of the voice came in through the window. There was no doubt that Violet was calling him: she and the others were out in the garden.

"Yes, I'm coming," he cried, and he jumped out of bed. He seemed— it was not odd— to be already dressed: he had on a jersey and flannel trousers, but his feet were bare and he slipped on a pair of shoes, and ran downstairs, taking the first short flight in one leap, like young Peter. The door of his mother's room was open, and he looked in, and there she was, of course, sitting at the table and writing letters.

"Oh, Peter, how lovely to have you home again," she said. "They're all out in the garden, and they've been calling you, darling. But come and see me soon, and have a talk."

Out he ran along the walk below the windows, and up the winding path through the shrubbery to the summer-house, for he knew they were going to play Pirates. He must hurry, or the pirates would be abroad before he got there, and as he ran, he called out:

"Oh, do wait a second: I'm coming."

He scudded past the golden maple and the bay tree, and there they all were in the summer-house which was home. And he took a flying leap up the steps and was among them.

IT WAS THERE that Calloway found him next morning. He must indeed have run up the winding path like a boy, for the new-laid gravel was spurned at long intervals by the toe-prints of his shoes.

4: The Double Pursuit

Edward Dyson

(as by "Dy Edwardson")

1865-1931

Punch (Melbourne) 7 May 1914

"I'VE GOT some news for you," said Belle's friend— "really remarkable news."

"Nothing has happened?" said Belle, anxiously.

"No— not yet. The news concerns a coming event."

"Indeed!" Belle took up a book, and turned a leaf or two.

"You need not affect lordly indifference, my dear," said Alice, smiling. "You know you are the most curious creature on earth. You were always inquisitive, even when, as a child, you broke a dozen fresh eggs looking for a little chicken."

"Possibly; but I have a reserve of cold contempt for wretches who deliberately pique one's curiosity, and then play upon it."

"That is only human nature as translated into all literature. What do your favourite authors do but pique your curiosity, and then play upon it? And you love them."

"You are not a favourite author."

"But I'm in the same position. I have interesting information to confide; it has a good plot, you are the heroine."

"I— I the heroine? Rubbish!"

"And there is a hero."

Miss Belle Hill arose, and walked deliberately to the door.

"I refuse to have my feelings trifled with," she said. "You can tell your silly old story to the flies."

Alice, fearful of losing an audience, seized her friend.

"No," she said, "you shall not escape me. Someone else may tell you, and I adore the office of newsbearer. Well, my darling, there is a man who is going to marry you."

"I trust so— somewhere, sometime."

"The man is here, the time within twelve months. He is tall, rather good looking, a good provider, my sweet." Alice laughed. "That is very important, I believe."

"You are talking sheer balderdash."

"Nothing of the kind. He saw you in the theatre on Saturday night. He asked Ned who you were when they met in the interval. Later he told Clarkson that he had seen the girl he was going to marry. Clarkson congratulated him.

" 'That,' he said, 'is a trifle premature. I don't know the girl, but she is beautiful; she has purple eyes, and a nose that would make Cleopatra's look like

a winkle.' Yes, my love, that was his simile. 'But,' said Clarkson, 'if you're not acquainted with her, how do you know you are going to marry her?'

" 'I know I have a strong will,' said the interesting stranger, 'and I know I was never so determined about anything in all my life.' Clarkson told Tom what McLeod had said, little knowing that the doomed lady was yourself."

"I think you are jumping at conclusions, Alice," said Belle, severely.

"Nothing of the kind. Ned recognised you by further trifling details communicated to Clarkson by the handsome and impetuous hero. It is all up, my girl."

"Do you think so? If the impudent snob meant me, I fancy he will find it difficult to even make my acquaintance in twelve months."

"Don't he hard on the poor fellow. He is awfully nice to look at. Ned gives him a great character, and Ned, you know, like all conceited men, is notoriously sceptical about presentable members of his sex."

"I am not at all concerned with the man, beyond recognising him as an egotistical prig."

"Be reasonable. He named no names. He was talking to Clarkson about someone he deemed to be a stranger to him, and the identity of the lady was only established by Clarkson's frivolous comments on the romance. Clarkson has no idea now of whom McLeod was talking. Ned knows, I know, you know, none other. You might at least pive your admirer a fair field, if you can give him no favour."

" 'I shall give him th' broad iv me back!' as Quinn would say."

"Well, I am sorry I told you. I thought you were a better sport."

Miss Belle Hill was soon conscious of the pursuit.

A few nights later, when she and Alice were together at a concert, her friend whispered: "Don't look round, my dear. He's here— the villain who still pursues her. He is in the tenth seat, third row, a tallish man with peculiar eyes, and much hair dashed back in the American fashion. Do have a peep at him."

Belle, while pretending supreme indifference, did have a peep at him. It was only a quick glance, her eye seeming to pass over him as if he did not exist; but that glance photographed him on her brain. If Belle had had the honesty to confess the resulting impression, even to herself, she would have acknowledged him rather fine and impressive. If she had ever had an ideal this man came very near to it. He looked a man who could do things— strong, kindly, neatly framed, and not without distinction. But Belle was in no mood to be generous. It was war, and he was the enemy. The struggle so far as she was concerned was to be all in retreat.

After that she discovered a dozen proofs in one month that the pursuer was on her track. She saw him hovering on the outskirts at social functions she

attended, and detected many effort on his part to get in touch— efforts she. evaded quietly, and without the smallest display of consciousness.

McLeod had no reason to believe she was aware of his existence, yet no one was so much in her mind if he happened to be anywhere upon her social horizon.

Once he asked Ned Swinnerton, Alice's husband, to introduce him. Ned, knowing the situation, but unable to refuse, was leading his friend across a full ballroom, when Belle drifted out of a door and was lost in the big garden. For the rest of the evening she made only fleeting appearances among tha dancers.

Sometimes Don McLeod pressed the quarry very closely; but she always evaded, and five months of his twelve had sped.

Then it came upon her suddenly. She was sitting in a corner of Alice Swinnerton's drawing room, reading, and a voice at her elbow said :

"Belle, Mr. McLeod has been pleading for the privilege of an introduction. May I? Miss Hill is my dearest friend, Mr. McLeod."

Belle bowed. She looked quite collected, despite the fact that she had been taken at great disadvantage; but really a well-burst of indignation against Alice was raging within her usually placid soui

"Miss Hill," said McLeod, and his voice had just the right quality. "I have been seeking your acquaintance for a iong time."

"Indeed." She spoke as a disinterested party.

"Yes. But you seemed as elusive as the rainbow."

"Rainbow chasing is a sad waste of time and energy."

"Perhaps. But I have known some very happy rainbow-chasers. However, I did not say I was chasing rainbows, only that you were as unattainable as the beautiful illusion."

"Having come up to the illusion, prepare for disillusionment."

"No," he said, "I am prepared for further wonder."

She kept the conversation hard down to the baldest commonplaces after that, and seized the first opportunity of escaping and cornering Alice Swinnerton.

"You wretch!" she said. "You mean little schemer, this was a plot. You brought me here— you brought me here deliberately. You're a matchmaking monomaniac, and I might have known what to expect, but never again."

"Yes, I yielded to his pleadings, and he is such a good dear fellow that I thought it unfair to you to keep you apart. If you have a grain of sense you'll let Don McLeod keep his resolution. He'll worth having, let me tell you."

"Indeed? And I am to expose myself as a creature to be caught, manhandled, and tamed by the first conceited, boasting scamp who takes up the chase."

After that Belle avoided the Swinnertons, and two more months passed with only fitful glances of McLeod manoeuvring vainly and miserably in the distance.

IT WAS a beautiful blue afternoon. Miss Belle Hill, in a pretty blue dress, under a pretty blue sunshade, sat on the pier reading. She had been reading for over an hour, and was absorbed in the story. A sudden vagrant puff of wind, inspired by heaven knows what motive, wrenched her sunshade from her lnnd. Belle dropped her book, and darted to recover her property. Her toe struck a bolt-head in the planking, and handsome, dignified Miss Hill went overboard.

The first thought of the unfortunate young lady on coming to the surface was the hope that no one had seen the undignified plunge. The next thought was concerned with the more urgent necessities of the situation.

As it happened, Belle had not included swimming among her many accomplishments, and the pier was deserted. It almost seemed that no one had seen the accident— and now the poor girl's opinion was changed. She would be willing to put up with the ignominy if only someone would come to her assistance.

Luckily, two eyes at least had seen the pIunge, but from a distance, and one man, unseen by the drowning girl, was racing at top speed along the pier. He called to two boatmen in "assin?.

Don M'T.foi Ii-hI hern watching Miss Hill for half-an-hour nast from the corner of a boatshed. He now realised what the penalty of approching her would be, and had almost abandoned hope of being able to keep his resolution. The girl hated him. Her avoidance of him was deliberate, her attitude distinctly antagonistic.

Miss Hill had quite an unpleasant time in the water, but was mercifully spared the worst. Oblivion came to her rescue. Then the man intervened.

WHEN BELLE recovered consciousness she was in a strange bed. A uniformed nurse was by her side, and Alice Swinnerton sat submissively in a corner, with every trace of protracted weeping on and about her.

All Belle knew was that a gentleman, name unknown, description vague, had jumped into the sea, dived for her, and borne her to a boat. Then the unknown had taken quick steps to secure medical aid, and, having done his best, had mysteriously disappeared.

The two boatmen told Belle all she knew of her preserver.

"He was a plucky bloke, all right," said one. "He dived four times afore he got you, an' when ha did get you he was pretty well all out. If our boat hadn't been 'andy, it would have been all up with the pair of you, lady."

"And then he simply walked away?"

"He couldn't walk or do any thin' else for a bit, what time me an' Sara here was workin' on you ; but when he could stagger he was off to the nearest telephone after doctors, an' nurses, an' all sorts."

This was some days after Miss Hill's recovery, and she had become possessed of ail insatiable curiosity concerning her saviour. Who was he? What was he? Why had he gone off so strangely? She owed her life to him. He had risked his own almost to the last moment, and had been content to pass out, unthanked, unhonoured. The papers were singing the praises of the stranger, inviting him to accept a public ovation; but he remained hidden, careless apparently of Miss Hill's gratitude or the admiration of the crowd.

Not only Belle's curiosity was excited— her pride was toached. Meanwhile, Don McLeod had apparently given up the hunt; but that did not matter, she had no thoughts for him now— her mind was upon her mysterious preserver.

Belle went back to the boatmen. They repeat their story, with a little additional detail; but it struck Miss Hill that they were not quite as ingenuous as they would have her believe. They were concealing something.

A month passed, and the search had been in vain. An appeal quite touchingly worded had been published in the agony columns of the *Age* and *Argus* without result.

Belle was distracted. The desire to discover the man to whom she owed her life became almost a passion. She interviewed the boatmen again.

"I will give you £20," she said, lf if you discover the man who rescued me."

"Twenty quid?" said Tom. Sam was deeply impressed. "We'll see about it, miss," he said.

The result was a visit from Sam and Tom. Tom was spokesman.

"Fact is, miss," he said, "we do know the bloke what saved your life. We could lay our 'ands on him any time ; but it's rather awkward, seein' he gave us a fiver not to tell no one, least of all you."

"He paid you to keep his identity from me?"

"Yes, miss. But £.20 is a very useful sum, and if you don't give us away we'll give you a hint, as it were."

Five minutes later Belle knew his name. Her preserver was Don McLeod. Now she understood much— the silence, the abandonment of his quest by Don.

"He would not have me put under an obligation to him," she said.

Belle thought over the matter, and wept. She was seeing Don McLeod in a new light.

Now began a curious development. Miss Belle Hill was pursuing Don "McLeod. Don was the person in high retreat, Belle was the assiduous follower. Of course, she was careful that her actions should not excite attention; but, all the same, all the time she was planning and manoeuvring to meet him, and in the end she ha'd to invite the assistance of Alice Swinnerton.

They met. They were alone in Alice's drawin room. He was sitting as far from her as the limits of the room allowed. She arose deliberately, and stood facing him.

"Mr. McLeod," she said, "I have been trying to meet you for some time."

"I did not know that," he said. "It seemed to me, Miss Hill, that I was the last person on earth you wished to meet."

"I am asking your pardon for any rudeness I ever showed you— asking humbly and in real contrition."

"Miss Hill!"

"And I wish to confess that my deliberate avoidance of you was silly pettishness, and at variance with my sincere teganl for.you."

"Belle! Belle! what are yon saying?" He was on his feet. He had snatched her hand.

"I am telling the truth, after acting a long lie. You once said you were determined to marry me within twelve months?"

"Great heaven ! How did you know that?"

"I know by a round-about means. Do you still wish to keep that resolution?"

"Belle! Belle! I adore you ! There's nothing the world could offer me so dear as that."

"Then you have only three weeks. It must be a short engagement."

He stepped hack. "Why are you doing this?" he asked in a changed tone.

"Because I love you. Because the world can offer me nothing so dear as the proud privilege of devoting to you the life you saved."

"You know?"

"Yes. I know. But I loved you before that." He held her in his arms. "I wanted to keep it from you. I wanted you to be free. It seemed that to he saddled with an obligation to me would be a long trial to you."

Don McLeod married Belle Hall eleven months and three weeks from the night of his great resolution.

5: The Retirement of Signor Lambert

Arthur Conan Doyle

1859-1930

Pearson's Magazine, Dec 1898

SIR WILLIAM SPARTER was a man who had raised himself in the course of a quarter of a century from earning four-and-twenty shillings a week as a fitter in Portsmouth Dockyard to being the owner of a yard and a fleet of his own. The little house in Lake Road, Landport, where he, an obscure mechanic, had first conceived the idea of the boilers which are associated with his name, is still pointed out to the curious. But now, at the age of fifty, he owned a mansion in Leinster Gardens, a country house at Taplow and a shooting in Argyleshire, with the best stable, the choicest cellars and the prettiest wife in town.

As untiring and inflexible as one of his own engines, his life had been directed to the one purpose of attaining the very best which the world had to give. Square-headed and round-shouldered, with massive, clean-shaven face and slow, deep-set eyes, he was the very embodiment of persistency and strength. Never once from the beginning of his career had public failure of any sort tarnished its brilliancy.

And yet he had failed in one thing, and that the most important of all. He had never succeeded in gaining the affection of his wife. She was the daughter of a surgeon, and the belle of a northern town when he married her. Even then he was rich and powerful, which made her overlook the twenty years which divided them. But he had come on a long way since then. His great Brazilian contract, his conversion into a company, his baronetcy— all these had been since his marriage. Only in the one thing he had never progressed. He could frighten his wife, he could dominate her, he could make her admire his strength and respect his consistency, he could mold her to his will in every other direction, but, do what he would, he could not make her love him.

But it was not for want of trying. With the unrelaxing patience which made him great in business, he had striven, year in and year out, to win her affection. But the very qualities which had helped him in his public life had made him unbearable in private. He was tactless, unsympathetic, overbearing, almost brutal sometimes, and utterly unable to think out those small attentions in word and deed which women value far more than the larger material benefits. The hundred-pound check tossed across a breakfast lable is a much smaller thing to a woman than the five-shilling charm which represents some thought and some trouble upon the part of the giver.

Sparter failed to understand this. With his mind full of the affairs of his firm, he had little time for the delicacies of life, and he endeavored to atone by periodical munificence. At the end of five years he found that he had lost rather

than gained in the lady's affections. Then, at this unwonted sense of failure, the evil side of the man's nature began to stir, and he became dangerous. But he was more dangerous still when a letter of his wife's came, through the treachery of a servant, into his hands, and he realized that if she was cold to him she had passion enough for another. His firm, his ironclads, his patents, everything was dropped, and he turned his huge energies to the undoing of the man.

He had been cold and silent during dinner that evening, and she had wondered vaguely what had occurred to change him. He had said nothing while they sat together over their coffee in the drawing-room. Once or twice she had glanced at him in surprise, and had found those deep-set gray eyes fixed upon her with an expression that was new to her. Her mind had been full of some one else, but gradually her husband's silence and the inscrutable expression of his face forced themselves upon her attention.

"You don't seem yourself, to-night, William. What is the matter?" she asked. "I hope there has been nothing to trouble you."

He was still silent and leaned back in his arm-chair, watching her beautiful face, which had turned pale with the sense of some impending catastrophe.

"Can I do anything for you, William?"

"Yes, you can write a letter."

"What is the letter?"

"I will tell you presently."

The last murmur died away in the house, and they heard the discreet step of Peterson, the butler, and the snick of the lock as he made all secure for the night. Sir William Sparter sat listening for a while. Then he rose.

"Come into my study," said he.

The room was dark, but he switched on the green-shaded electric lamp which stood upon the writing-table.

"Sit there at the table," said he. He closed the door and seated himself beside her. "I only wanted to tell you, Jacky, that I know about Lambert."

She gasped and shivered, flinching away from him with her hands out as if she feared a blow.

"Yes, I know everything," said he, and his quiet tone carried such conviction with it that she could not question what he said. She made no reply, but sat with her eyes fixed upon his grave, massive face. A clock ticked loudly upon the mantelpiece, but everything else was silent in the house. She had never noticed that ticking before, but now it was like the hammering of a nail into her head. He rose and put a sheet of paper before her. Then he drew one from his own pocket and flattened it out upon the corner of the table.

"I have a rough draft here of the letter which I wish you to copy," said he. "I will read it to you if you like. 'My own dearest Cecil: I will be at No. 29 at half-past six, and I particularly wish you to come before you go down to the opera.

Don't fail me, for I have the very strongest reasons for wishing to see you. Ever yours, Jacqueline.' Take up a pen and copy that letter."

"William, you are plotting some revenge. Oh, William, if I have wronged you, I am so sorry—"

"Copy that letter!"

"But what is it that you wish to do? Why should you desire him to come at that hour?"

"Copy that letter!"

"How can you be so harsh, William? You know very well—"

"Copy that letter!"

"I begin to hate you, William. I believe that it is a fiend, not a man, that I have married."

"Copy that letter!"

Gradually the inflexible will and the unfaltering purpose began to prevail over the creature of nerves and moods. Reluctantly, mutinously, she took the pen in her hand.

"You wouldn't harm him, William!"

"Copy that letter!"

"Will you promise to forgive me, if I do?"

"Copy that letter!"

She looked at him with the intention of defying him, but those masterful gray eyes dominated her. She was like a half-hypnotized creature, resentful, and yet obedient.

"There, will that satisfy you?"

He took the note from her hand and placed it in an envelope.

"Now address it to him!"

She wrote "Cecil Lambert, Esq., 138B, Half Moon street, W." in a straggling, agitated hand. Her husband very deliberately blotted it and placed it carefully in his pocket-book.

"I hope that you are satisfied now." said she with weak petulance.

"Quite," said he gravely. "You can go to your room. Mrs. McKay has my orders to sleep with you, and to see that you write no letters."

"Mrs. McKay! Do you expose me to the humiliation of being watched by my own servants?"

"Go to your room!"

"If you imagine that I am going to be under the orders of the housekeeper—"

"Go to your room!"

"Oh. William, who would have thought in the old days that you could ever have treated me like this? If my mother had ever dreamed—"

He took her by the arm, and led her to the door.

"Go to your room!" said he, and she passed out into the darkened hall. He closed the door and returned to the writing table. Out of a drawer he took two things which he had purchased that day, the one a paper and the other a book. The former was a recent number of the *Musical Record*, and it contained a biography and picture of the famous Signor Lambert, whose wonderful tenor voice had been the delight of the public and the despair of his rivals. The picture was that of a good-natured, self-satisfied creature, young and handsome, with a full eye, a curling mustache and a bull neck. The biography explained that he was only in his twenty-seventh year, that his career had been one continued triumph, that he was devoted to his art, and that his voice was worth to him, at a very moderate computation, some twenty thousand pounds a year. All this Sir William Sparter read very carefully, with his great brows drawn down, and a furrow like a gash between them, as his way was when his attention was concentrated. Then he folded the paper up again, and he opened the book.

It was a curious work for such a man to select for his reading— a technical treatise upon the organs of speech and voice-production. There were numerous colored illustrations, to which he paid particular attention. Most of them were of the internal anatomy of the larynx, with the silvery vocal cords shining from under the pink arytenoid cartilage. Far into the night Sir William Sparter, with those great virile eyebrows still bunched together, pored over these irrelevant pictures, and read and reread the text in which they were explained.

DR. MANIFOLD ORMONDE, the famous throat specialist, of Cavendish square, was surprised next morning when his butler brought the card of Sir William Sparter into his consulting-room. He had met him at dinner at the table of Lord Marvin a few nights before, and it struck him at that time that he had seldom seen a man who looked such a type of rude, physical health. So he thought again, as the square, thick-set figure of the shipbuilder was ushered in to him.

"Glad to see you again, Sir William," said the specialist. "I hope there is nothing wrong with your health."

"Nothing, thank you."

He sat down in the chair which the doctor had indicated, and he ran his eyes slowly and deliberately round the room. Dr. Ormonde watched him with some curiosity, for he had the air of a man who looks for something which he had expected to see.

"No, I didn't come about my health." said he at last. "I came for information."

"Whatever I can give you is entirely at your disposal."

"I have been studying the throat a little of late. I read Mclntyre's book about it. I suppose that is all right."

"An elementary treatise, but accurate as far as it goes."

"I had an idea that you would be likely to have a model or something of that kind."

For answer the doctor unclasped the lid of a yellow, shining box upon his consulting-room table, and turned it back upon the hinge. Within was a complete model of the human vocal organs.

"You are right, you see," said he.

Sir William Sparter stood up, and bent over the model.

"It's a neat little bit of work," said he, looking at it with the critical eyes of an engineer. "This is the glottis, is it not? And here is the epiglottis."

"Precisely. And here are the cords."

"What would happen if you cut them?"

"Cut what?"

"These things— the vocal cords."

"But you could not cut them. They are out of the reach of accident."

"But if such a thing did happen?"

"There is no such case upon record, but, of course, the person would become dumb— for a time, at any rate."

"You have a large practice among singers, have you not?"

"The largest in London."

"I suppose you agree with what this man Mclntyre says, that a fine voice depends partly upon the cords."

"The volume of sound would depend upon the lung capacity, but the clearness of the note would correspond with the complete control which the singer exercised over the cords.

"Any roughness or notching of the cords would ruin the voice?"

"For singing purposes, undoubtedly— but your researches seem to be taking a very curious direction."

"Yes," said Sir William, as he picked up his hat, and laid a fee upon the corner of the table. "They are a little out of the common, are they not?"

WARBURTON STREET is one of the network of thoroughfares which connects Chelsea with Kensington, and it is chiefly remarkable for the number of studios it contains. Signor Lambert, the famous tenor, owned an apartment here, and his neat little dark-green brougham might have been seen several times a week waiting at the head of the long passage which led down to the chambers in question.

When Sir William Sparter, muffled in his overcoat, and carrying a small black leather bag in his hand, turned the corner, he saw the lamps of the carriage against the curb, and knew that the man whom he had come to see was already

in the place of assignation. He passed the empty brougham, and walked up the tile-paved passage with the yellow gas lamp shining at the far end of it.

The door was open, and led into a large empty hall, laid down with coconut matting and stained with many footmarks. The place was a rabbit warren by daylight, but now, when the working hours were over, it was deserted. A housekeeper in the basement was the only permanent resident. Sir William paused, but everything was silent, and everything was dark save for one door which was outlined in thin yellow slashes. He pushed it open and entered. Then he locked it upon the inside and put the key in his pocket.

It was a large room, scantily furnished, and lit by a single oil lamp upon a center-table. On a chair at the farther side of the table a man had been sitting, who had sprung to his feet with an exclamation of joy, which had changed into one of surprise, and culminated in an oath.

"What the devil do you mean by locking that door? Unlock it again, sir, this instant!"

Sir William did not even answer him. He advanced to the table, opened the bag, and began to take out all sorts of things— a green bottle, a dentist's gag, an inhaler, a forceps, a curved bistoury, a curious pair of scissors. Signor Lambert stood staring at him in a paralysis of rage and astonishment.

"You infernal scoundrel— who are you, and what do you want?"

Sir William had emptied his bag, and now he took off his overcoat and laid it over the back of a chair. Then for the first time he turned his eyes upon the singer. He was a taller man than himself, but far slighter and weaker. The engineer, though short, was exceedingly powerful, with muscles which had been toughened by hard physical work. His broad shoulders, arching chest and great gnarled hands gave him the outline of a gorilla. Lambert shrunk away from him, frightened by his sinister figure and by his cold, inexorable eyes.

"Have you come to rob me?" he gasped.

"I have come to speak to you. My name is Sparter."

Lambert tried to retain his grasp upon the self-possession which was rapidly slipping away from him.

"Sparter!" said he. with an attempt at jauntiness. "Sir William Sparter, I presume? I have had the pleasure of meeting Lady Sparter, and I have heard her mention you. May I ask the object of this visit?" He buttoned up his coat with twitching fingers, and tried to look rierce over his collar.

"I've come," said Sparter. jerking some fluid from the green bottle into the inhaler, "to change your voice."

"To change my voice?"

"Precisely."

"You are a madman! What do you mean?"

"Kindly lie back upon the settee."

"You are raving! I see it all. You wish to bully me. You have some motive in this. You imagine that there are relations between Lady Sparter and me. I do assure you that your wife—"

"My wife has nothing to do with the matter either now or hereafter. Her name does not appear at all. My motives are musical—purely musical, you understand. I don't like your voice. It wants treatment. Lie back upon the settee!"

"Sir William, I give you my word of honor—"

"Lie back."

"You're choking me! It's chloroform! Help, help, help! You brute! Let me go! Let me go, I say! Oh, please! Lemme— Lemme—Lem—!" His head had fallen back, and he muttered into the inhaler. Sir William pulled up the table which held the lamp and the instrument.

It was some minutes after the gentleman with the overcoat and the bag had emerged that the coachman outside heard a voice shouting, and shouting very hoarsely and angrily, within the building. Presently came the sounds of unsteady steps, and his master, crimson with rage, stumbled out into the yellow circle thrown by the carriage lamps.

"You, Holden!" he cried, "you leave my service to-night. Did you not hear me calling? Why did you not come?"

The man looked at him in bewilderment, and shuddered at the color of his shirt-front.

"Yes, sir, I heard some one calling," he answered, "but it wasn't you, sir. It was a voice that I had never heard before."

"CONSIDERABLE disappointment was caused at the opera last week," said one of the best-informed musical critics, "by the fact that Signor Cecil Lambert was unable to appear in the various roles which had been announced. On Tuesday night it was only, at the very last instant that the management learned of the grave indisposition which had overtaken him, and had it not been for the presence of Jean Caravatti. who had understudied the part, the piece must have been abandoned. Since then we regret to hear that Signor Lambert's seizure was even more severe than was originally thought, and that it consists of an acute form of laryngitis, spreading to the vocal cords, and involving changes which may permanently affect the quality of his voice. All lovers of music will hope that these reports may prove to be pessimistic, and that we may soon be charmed once more by the finest tenor which we have heard for many a year upon the London operatic stage."

6: The Widow's Clock

Bernard Capes

1854-1918

The Pall Mall Magazine May 1900

I WAS MOVED to pause outside the premises of Bull Hacker, auctioneers. Unaccountable excitement exhaled from their very windows, grew intricate on their steps, congested at their doorway. Something out of the common, it was evident, was passing within.

I accosted a young man who was battling his way forth at the moment. The young man's face was a red mask of hilarity.

"What's up?" said he. "Oh, Lord! go and look. Old Bull's took mad, and he's knocking down the lots like skittles. There's some stuff goin' cheap there, there is."

He was borne past me, and I fought my way into the auction-room. I had a hard struggle to get within view of the rostrum; and then I saw a figure, with eyes like a Cheshire cat's, standing— or rather dancing— therein. It (the figure) was that, assuredly, of the urbane Mr. Bull; but he had put a copper saucepan on his head, and tied up his side-whiskers with ribbons.

Two grinning, embarrassed-looking men in shirt-sleeves had just placed upon the long table under the pulpit a very presentable plaster cast of the Capitoline Venus. The auctioneer addressed the company with quite exaggerated suavity.

"Look at that, gentlemen," said he: "pray don't look at me! My better half, gentlemen, and much better worth your consideration. A little stiff and cold, but a rare bargain if you keep her from putting rat poison in the soup.— How much for Mrs. Bull, now?— how much for the hard, unsympathetic lady? She's given me many a dressing, gentlemen, or she'd be better accommodated in that respect herself. A charitable soul indeed."

Here he cocked his saucepan over me eye, folded his arms, and ogling the company insinuatingly suddenly bent down and bonneted with his hammer an old white-hatted broker who sat chuckling just underneath.

"The property of a gentleman going abroad!" he bellowed, recovering himself. "Must sell— must sell! Start your bids, and earn a reputation for gallantry in the Babylonian marriage market."

"A shillun," sniggered a sheepish-faced individual at the table.

Mr. Bull snatched off his saucepan and beat it flat on the desk.

"Gone for a shilling!" he roared, "and dear at the price."

There had been a flank movement up the room. Blue-coated figures now rose from the crowd and seized the madman. A scene of wild uproar and confusion ensued. Presently I found myself in the street.

"How did it come about?" I said to a neighbour, as I endeavoured to coax the creases out of a crumpled tile.

"Drink," said he laconically. "Old Bull was always a soaker, he was."

"The sales won't hold, I suppose?' said I.

"They'll hold tight enough for them as cut their lucky with the stuff afore he was found out," answered my friend gruffly. "Why, he was a-selling things for songs at first— rail good things, mind you," he said.

I departed, wondering; and certain inquiries I prosecuted set me wondering yet more.

The following day I made occasion to call upon my acquaintance Aubrey Standish. He is a *curioso*, and a young man of a most fastidious and delicate dilettanteism— of Catholic taste also, within the liberal limits of Art. At the same time he holds (or held) it his particular principle that, given such tact and knowledge as his own, an extreme virtuosity could be indulged on nothing larger than an ordinary household income, so to speak; in illustration of which his rooms (he had but three) were shrines containing treasures of heavenly *marqueterie* and *bijouterie*. Enamels, by Jean Pctitot; *cinquecento intaglios* in amethyst, and earlier cameos by Dioscorides; unique bits of gomroon porcelain ware from Chelsea; pot-pourri in old Nanking vases; fragments of tapestry; exquisite painted fans from the studios of M. Duvelleroy; swords in niello; a bronze fish, presumptively by Benvenuto Cellini,— such and varied bric-a-brac, sleeking from the chestnut glooms of Chippendale corner cupboards, disposed with a crafty affectation of insouciance on Louis XV commodes, blinking soft slumberous eyes from green plush-lined showcase tables, was the practical expression of Aubrey's boasted principle. And he would assure you, with all the enthusiasm of a nervous, lisping speech, that it needed but the knowledge of how to sit effectively in the sunshine for the rarest butterflies of Art to settle on one's hand. That was his rendering of the Tout vient à qui sait attendre, which was a proverb too much in the common way for one of his ultra-refinement; yet he was not exalted above the exercise of some particularly mean qualities— or, at least, so my Philistinism interpreted him.

Now he came skipping, in a Japanese silk dressing-gown, from his bedroom, and put a thin, scented hand on each of my shoulders.

"What a sweet tie!" said he. "Permit me. It tones, with your face, into the very aurelian tints of Giovanni Bellini."

"Oh, go to the devil!" said I crossly. "If I'm jaundiced, I'm jaundiced, that's all."

"My dear friend," said he, releasing me, "you're fretful. You take life at too high a pressure. You exhale a humanity before which I seem to shrink like a sensitive plant. I can never escape the feeling when you visit me, that my little museum will fly into prismatic splinters, like an opal too rudely unearthed."

I wanted, of course, to kick him; but bethought myself that this was scarcely the way to enforce a certain mission on which I had entered.

"Standish—" said I.

"Now, now," said he, lifting his hands, palms to me, and closing his eyes; "not the Charity Organisation again, my very sweet fellow! Not some malodorous citizen with a compound fracture of his tail, or a widow respectable in everything but the possession of twins. You wouldn't besmirch my preserves with such smut?"

"I'm to be bought out."

"Oh dear!" he said, with a little deprecating smile. "This is terrible. Do let me entreat your attention to that exquisite Bartolozzi. I picked it up last week for a mere song— literally, the merest swan-song of a dying consumptive."

"Standish, I want to put it to you—"

He sank upon an Adams settee, sniffed at a tiny filagree vinaigrette, and fluttered a whisp of a handkerchief.

"I have learned to gather flowers of the wilderness. I have made a rose-crown of patience, till it blossoms about my head. Go on!" he murmured faintly.

"Standish, I will take no denial that you were at Bull Hacker's sale yesterday."

"The subtlest penetration!" he whispered. "Were you there too?"

"Yes."

"Then," said he, "you were witness of a strange seizure."

"Not of yours," said I— "for it amounts to nothing else.".He only shrugged his eyebrows— a momentary spasm of astonishment.

"Was it not?" said I. "There is the very article, I see."

I had already 'spotted,' standing in the corner, what I sought— a lank "grandfather" clock in a Chippendale case. I nodded towards it significantly.

"It's by Smith of Crowland," said Standish, rallying, in the excitement of the collector. "His work was unique— the best of kind. I assure you, I cannot recall a more vital illustration of principles than is presented in that bargain."

"It is unique, you say?"

"I believe entirely. My one regret is, it doesn't go— or at least, as yet I haven't been able to make it. And it was the durable quality of the Crownland clocks that gained them their reputation."

"Shall I examine it? I have a clever mechanical turn."

"By all means. I can trust you to handle it, I am sure."

He did not look as if he meant it; but I went and unbuttoned the door in the belly of the thing, and felt with my hand up along the pendulum.

"What would you say," said I, as I was thus engaged, "that this have fetched under favourable conditions?"

"Eighty pounds," said Standish, with all the decision of a dealer.

"And you gave for it yesterday?"

"Eighteen pence."

His whole face creased with goblin merriment. His laugh was always a little hoarse, as if it were only the broken-out expression of what had been choking him for some time internally.

Suddenly he came to his feet.

"You have set it going?" he cried.

"The pendulum was merely wired high up to the case. What time is it?"

He affected a fob, with dangling seals. He drew out what the Regency bucks called a warming-pan.

"Twenty minutes to twelve," he said.

Fortuitously, I had but to move the hands of the bargain a minute or two.

"There's your clock going," said I, and shut the case.

"You are a genius!" he cried. "My happiness is complete. What an engaging possession is a practical head!"

"I'm glad you think so. It can always command its price, you mean; and so I may as well state it."

"Ha, ha! to be sure. The service of a friend is beyond price."

"Not in the least. I want eighty pounds for mine."

"Oh! of course. You're rating yourself higher than you do to the Income Tax assessors."

"I'm perfectly serious. I want eighty pounds— less eighteen-pence."

He was beginning to laugh— checked himself, and stared at me in amazement, already with a touch of anger in it.

"Are you daft?" he said.

"Not in the least. I'll explain myself. In taking advantage of that man's madness yesterday, Standish, I'm not at all sure you didn't give your economic principles an ugly look of felony."

His lip lifted, and he did not answer for a moment. Then said he, in a straitened voice: "I see, I see. This is a blackmailing affair."

I kept my temper royally.

"No," I said. "And I shan't be at the trouble to refute such a charge. I appeal only to your sense of fair-play. You must have it, Standish, for all your virtuosity. Will you listen while I tell you the facts of the case?"

"Oh! I'll listen," he said.

"Very well. Now, I'll explain. That clock was the property of a wretched widow— a woman once in decent circumstances, but at last reduced to the hardest necessity. I've come across her way of my work on behalf of the Society; and a certain association of guess and inquiry had led me to the truth. Her husband was a Liverpool-Irish 'patriot' of '81. I believe he was mixed up in the dynamite business. He died, however, years ago in prison. Piece by piece she has parted with every stick of their common property, till at last only the clock

remained. That she could not find it in her heart to sell. He had always shown such an affection for it. No doubt even the worst of us have our little emotional associations. Perhaps it had once stood in his father's cottage. And so— though from the date of his arrest it had proved useless as a timepiece"— ("Ha!" murmured Standish, with a happy nod to me)— "she stuck to it. Then, at last, hunger and the devil broke her loyalty. Mr. Bull happened on the relic in a professional way, presumed its value, and being for all his sins something better than a collector, didn't offer to buy it for eighteenpence, but proposed, like an honest man, to include it, with a reserve, in one of his sales."

I came to an end, and looked at Standish.

"Without reserve, I think," said he.

"With," said I. "The man was as mad as a hatter. He had to be removed in the end."

"You greatly interest me," said Standish. "I assure you that— though, of course, I thought there was something a little exceptional about our friend's conduct— I had no inkling, at that early stage, that things would reach so disastrous a climax."

"I am quite ready to believe it. And, now you know, you will draw the widow a cheque for eighty pounds."

Standish shook his head, with quite a rippling little laugh.

"You are a sweet, droll fellow," he said: "the dearest utilitarian, by way of your friends' pockets. If I could materialise such a rare piece of Quixotism and put it in a case, I would give you the money on the spot— if I had it."

"At least send back the clock and let it be re-sold."

He looked at me, as if politeness alone restrained him from a positive guffaw.

"Unconscious humourist!" he murmured thickly. Then he explained very kindly. "The whole text of my capital is sunk in these things— these glorious trifles, every one of which represents an opportunity most patiently coveted. The margin only stands for my living expenses. Now, do you really imagine I will forego the little rewards, when they reach me, of such devotion?— and for the benefit of a dead savage's widow?" he added, with an irrepressible laugh.

"It was an accident, Standish."

"Such is our chance."

"Is it hopeless my trying to move you?"

"You have moved me already, my dear soul. Positively, a new value attaches in my eyes to this bargain in the knowledge that it is pronounced, in a certain sense, historical. Pray look at the matter impartially. Why should all the unselfishness be demanded of me who make no profession of dealing in these common virtues? Probably your bombazine widow is much better equipped with the article than I am. Comfort her with the Christian assurance that my

expectations are realised, if hers are not. Now, pray don't say any more. It is painful and unprofitable to both of us. Let me show you an almost perfect example of a gemma potaria— a sardonyx drinking-cup that I picked— ".I burst out, without more ado.

"Hang your drinking-cup!" I shouted; "you're just an inhuman swindler. Hang your drinking-cup, I say!"— and I made for the door.

Standish followed me, with imperturbable unconcern, down the stairs. At the moment, the liberated clock above began to strike midday.

"Hear it!" he cried triumphantly, pausing on a step. "It proclaims its emancipation! It speaks to its deliverer with a voice of silver! 'A bargain is a bargain,' it shrills. 'A—' "

Where was I! My brain was stuffed with wool, it seemed, and my eyes were mere balls of smoked glass. In a moment I staggered to my feet. Another shape was poised tottering just above me. The stairway rolled with choking vapour, through which— as it slowly dissipated by way of an open skylight— a wreck of burst paper and broken banister rails was revealed.

As sight returned to me, I stared up at Standish. He looked like nothing so much as a torn Japanese doll. Then with one impulse we laboured up through the inferno, and stood at the doorway of the shattered museum.

I think there cannot have remained two consecutive inches of sound material anywhere in the room. The entire show was exploded into shivers. Porcelain, tapestry, enamels, with the cabinets that had enshrined them— all were committed in undistinguishable fragments to a common ruin.

Tout vient à sait attendre: Everything comes to him that knows how to wait— even a very lively retribution for his sins.

"Standish," I said (I could only speak in croaks)— "the patriot's clock, Standish— it must have been set to midday! Standish— you have been a good angel to the bombazine widow."

7: August Heat

William Fryer Harvey

1885-1937

Collected in: *Midnight House and other Tales*, 1910

PHENISTONE Road, Clapham.
August 20th, 190—.

I have had what I believe to be the most remarkable day in my life, and while the events are still fresh in my mind, I wish to put them down on paper as clearly as possible.

Let me say at the outset that my name is James Clarence Withencroft.

I am forty years old, in perfect health, never having known a day's illness.

By profession I am an artist, not a very successful one, but I earn enough money by my black-and-white work to satisfy my necessary wants.

My only near relative, a sister, died five years ago, so that I am independent. I breakfasted this morning at nine, and after glancing through the morning paper I lighted my pipe and proceeded to let my mind wander in the hope that I might chance upon some subject for my pencil.

The room, though door and windows were open, was oppressively hot, and I had just made up my mind that the coolest and most comfortable place in the neighbourhood would be the deep end of the public swimming bath, when the idea came.

I began to draw. So intent was I on my work that I left my lunch untouched, only stopping work when the clock of St. Jude's struck four.

The final result, for a hurried sketch, was, I felt sure, the best thing I had done. It showed a criminal in the dock immediately after the judge had pronounced sentence. The man was fat—enormously fat. The flesh hung in rolls about his chin; it creased his huge, stumpy neck. He was clean shaven (perhaps I should say a few days before he must have been clean shaven) and almost bald. He stood in the dock, his short, clumsy fingers clasping the rail, looking straight in front of him. The feeling that his expression conveyed was not so much one of horror as of utter, absolute collapse.

There seemed nothing in the man strong enough to sustain that mountain of flesh.

I rolled up the sketch, and without quite knowing why, placed it in my pocket. Then with the rare sense of happiness which the knowledge of a good thing well done gives, I left the house.

I believe that I set out with the idea of calling upon Trenton, for I remember walking along Lytton Street and turning to the right along Gilchrist Road at the bottom of the hill where the men were at work on the new tram lines.

From there onwards I have only the vaguest recollection of where I went. The one thing of which I was fully conscious was the awful heat, that came up from the dusty asphalt pavement as an almost palpable wave. I longed for the thunder promised by the great banks of copper-coloured cloud that hung low over the western sky.

I must have walked five or six miles, when a small boy roused me from my reverie by asking the time.

It was twenty minutes to seven.

When he left me I began to take stock of my bearings. I found myself standing before a gate that led into a yard bordered by a strip of thirsty earth, where there were flowers, purple stock and scarlet geranium. Above the entrance was a board with the inscription—

CHS. ATKINSON.
MONUMENTAL MASON.
WORKER IN ENGLISH AND ITALIAN MARBLES

From the yard itself came a cheery whistle, the noise of hammer blows, and the cold sound of steel meeting stone.

A sudden impulse made me enter.

A man was sitting with his back towards me, busy at work on a slab of curiously veined marble. He turned round as he heard my steps and I stopped short.

It was the man I had been drawing, whose portrait lay in my pocket.

He sat there, huge and elephantine, the sweat pouring from his scalp, which he wiped with a red silk handkerchief. But though the face was the same, the expression was absolutely different.

He greeted me smiling, as if we were old friends, and shook my hand.

I apologised for my intrusion.

"Everything is hot and glary outside," I said. "This seems an oasis in the wilderness."

"I don't know about the oasis," he replied, "but it certainly is hot, as hot as hell. Take a seat, sir!"

He pointed to the end of the gravestone on which he was at work, and I sat down.

"That's a beautiful piece of stone you've got hold of," I said.

He shook his head. "In a way it is," he answered; "the surface here is as fine as anything you could wish, but there's a big flaw at the back, though I don't expect you'd ever notice it. I could never make really a good job of a bit of marble like that. It would be all right in the summer like this; it wouldn't mind

the blasted heat. But wait till the winter comes. There's nothing quite like frost to find out the weak points in stone."

"Then what's it for?" I asked.

The man burst out laughing.

"You'd hardly believe me if I was to tell you it's for an exhibition, but it's the truth. Artists have exhibitions: so do grocers and butchers; we have them too. All the latest little things in headstones, you know."

He went on to talk of marbles, which sort best withstood wind and rain, and which were easiest to work; then of his garden and a new sort of carnation he had bought. At the end of every other minute he would drop his tools, wipe his shining head, and curse the heat.

I said little, for I felt uneasy. There was something unnatural, uncanny, in meeting this man.

I tried at first to persuade myself that I had seen him before, that his face, unknown to me, had found a place in some out-of-the-way corner of my memory, but I knew that I was practising little more than a plausible piece of self-deception.

Mr. Atkinson finished his work, spat on the ground, and got up with a sigh of relief.

"There! what do you think of that?" he said, with an air of evident pride. The inscription which I read for the first time was this—

SACRED TO THE MEMORY
OF
JAMES CLARENCE WITHENCROFT.
BORN JAN. 18TH, 1860.
HE PASSED AWAY VERY SUDDENLY
ON AUGUST 20TH, 190—
"In the midst of life we are in death."

For some time I sat in silence. Then a cold shudder ran down my spine. I asked him where he had seen the name.

"Oh, I didn't see it anywhere," replied Mr. Atkinson. "I wanted some name, and I put down the first that came into my head. Why do you want to know?"

"It's a strange coincidence, but it happens to be mine." He gave a long, low whistle.

"And the dates?"

"I can only answer for one of them, and that's correct."

"It's a rum go!" he said.

But he knew less than I did. I told him of my morning's work. I took the sketch from my pocket and showed it to him. As he looked, the expression of his face altered until it became more and more like that of the man I had drawn.

"And it was only the day before yesterday," he said, "that I told Maria there were no such things as ghosts!"

Neither of us had seen a ghost, but I knew what he meant.

"You probably heard my name," I said.

"And you must have seen me somewhere and have forgotten it! Were you at Clacton-on-Sea last July?"

I had never been to Clacton in my life. We were silent for some time. We were both looking at the same thing, the two dates on the gravestone, and one was right.

"Come inside and have some supper," said Mr. Atkinson.

His wife was a cheerful little woman, with the flaky red cheeks of the country-bred. Her husband introduced me as a friend of his who was an artist. The result was unfortunate, for after the sardines and watercress had been removed, she brought out a Doré Bible, and I had to sit and express my admiration for nearly half an hour.

I went outside, and found Atkinson sitting on the gravestone smoking.

We resumed the conversation at the point we had left off. "You must excuse my asking," I said, "but do you know of anything you've done for which you could be put on trial?"

He shook his head. "I'm not a bankrupt, the business is prosperous enough. Three years ago I gave turkeys to some of the guardians at Christmas, but that's all I can think of. And they were small ones, too," he added as an afterthought.

He got up, fetched a can from the porch, and began to water the flowers. "Twice a day regular in the hot weather," he said, "and then the heat sometimes gets the better of the delicate ones. And ferns, good Lord! they could never stand it. Where do you live?"

I told him my address. It would take an hour's quick walk to get back home.

"It's like this," he said. "We'll look at the matter straight. If you go back home to-night, you take your chance of accidents. A cart may run over you, and there's always banana skins and orange peel, to say nothing of fallen ladders."

He spoke of the improbable with an intense seriousness that would have been laughable six hours before. But I did not laugh.

"The best thing we can do," he continued, "is for you to stay here till twelve o'clock. We'll go upstairs and smoke, it may be cooler inside."

To my surprise I agreed.

WE ARE SITTING now in a long, low room beneath the eaves. Atkinson has sent his wife to bed. He himself is busy sharpening some tools at a little oilstone, smoking one of my cigars the while.

The air seems charged with thunder. I am writing this at a shaky table before the open window.

The leg is cracked, and Atkinson, who seems a handy man with his tools, is going to mend it as soon as he has finished putting an edge on his chisel.

It is after eleven now. I shall be gone in less than an hour.

But the heat is stifling.

It is enough to send a man mad.

8: "Vengeance is Mine..."

P. C. Wren

1875-1941

Collected in: *Stepsons of France*, 1917

AS JEAN RIEN expressed it, he was bien touché; as le Légionnaire 'Erbiggin put it, he had got it in the neck; as the Bucking Bronco "allowed," his monica was up; as Jean Boule saw, he was dying.

One cannot blame him, since an Arab lance had pinned him to the ground and an Arab *flissa* had nearly severed his arm from his shoulder.

Jean Rien evidently blamed himself however, and for many things— chief among them a little matter of parricide, it seemed to Jean Boule, as he bent over him in his endeavour to comfort and to soothe.

"In much pain, *mon ami*?" the old soldier asked, as he moistened the dying man's lips and forehead.

"Little of body, but in great pain of mind.... I would confess to you, Père Boule.... I would ease my soul.... I would ask if you think I am a murderer.... I have not blamed myself until now that I am dying.... Now I am afraid.... Look you, Père Jean Boule, I was brought up by my mother (*le bon Dieu* rest and bless her soul) with one purpose in life, with one end to fulfil, with one deed to do. Nothing earlier can I remember than her making me repeat after her the words of a promise and an oath. Night after night, as I went to bed, morning after morning, as I arose, I said my prayers at her knee, and followed them by this promise and this oath which she had taught me. Never did we sit down to a meal, never did we rise from one, without this formula. From my very birth I was dedicated, and my life was devoted and avowed, to the fulfilment of this promise, the keeping of this oath.... Hear it....

> '*I, Jean-Without-A-Name, son of Marie Duval and Ober-Leutnant von Schlofen of the Hundred and Thirty-ninth Pomeranian Regiment, do most solemnly swear, that from my seventeenth birthday I will devote the whole of my mind and will, my strength and skill, my time and my money, to finding the man who in* 1870 *was Ober-Leutnant von Schlofen and who is my father, the torturer of my mother and the murderer of my mother's beloved husband, Jacques Duval. I do most solemnly swear that, having found him, I will call him "Father," I will torture him, as he tortured my mother, and I will kill him even as he killed him who should have been my father, so help me God and the Blessed Virgin. Amen.*'

"Yes, my friend, morning, noon, and night I repeated this after my mother, and at the conclusion of each repetition this poor soul, who loved and hated me, and whose heart was buried in the pit in which lay Jacques Duval and many more, would kiss me on the brow, and say, 'Thou art the instrument of God's vengeance.' For sixteen years she did this, and on my seventeenth birthday gave

me a knife that had belonged to Jacques Duval, together with her savings of seventeen years. The knife had killed poor Jacques, and the money was to help in his avenging by means of the knife.... Mad? Yes, mad as ever a human being was, poor soul.... But think of what she saw and suffered.... Married a week before war broke out, her husband torn from her arms to march away to fight, perhaps to be maimed and mangled, perhaps to die.... Months of solitude.... Rumours.... Hopes.... Soul-sickening fears.... Can you not see her in their little house— where they were to have been so happy— waiting, hoping, fearing? And then, one dark night, a heavy tramp of soldiers, screams, red-reflections lighting up the clean little room in which she slept, and then— blows on her door, harsh guttural shouts, and the crash of the burst-in door....

"For a fortnight the Herr Ober-Leutnant von Schlofen, in command of the detachment that had occupied the little village, made her house his headquarters, and as, from the first moment, she had defended herself tooth and nail, Marie Duval spent that time, bound hand and foot, and locked in her little room. At first, when she was untied, that she might eat and drink, she refused, but when pain, horror, grief, and every other anguished feeling had merged into a very madness of passion for revenge, she ate and drank, that she might have strength to slay....

"And the night that her teeth met in the Herr Ober-Leutnant's throat, her Jacques came back wounded, and they caught him and brought him to this foul and filthy von Schlofen swine of Germany....

"On learning they were husband and wife, von Schlofen confronted them in their bonds— she, half-dead with shame, exhaustion, and misery; he half-dead with wounds and the brutality of his captors. Then, while two of his vile bloodhounds held the woman, four others flung the man face downward over the kitchen table, placed a pail beneath his head, and von Schlofen cut his throat from ear to ear with that same knife....

"Thereafter they flogged Marie Duval with the Herr Ober-Leutnant's switch that she might learn obedience and gratitude, and that he might find her tamer....

"Mad? Oh yes, quite more than a little mad, this poor Marie Duval.... And when I was born, she dedicated me, as I say, her instrument of vengeance, so that on my seventeenth birthday I took train for Strasburg and the beginning of my quest. I had no great difficulty in tracking down this von Schlofen, who had become Colonel of the Hundred and Thirty-ninth Pomeranian Regiment, and then retired to his large estates in Silesia.

"When not hunting the boar and the deer there, he spent most of his time in an ancient, gloomy house in Thorn. And in Thorn I took up my abode and worked at my trade of carpenter....

"I shall never forget my first sight of the man who was my father and my quarry; the man who gave me birth and whom I had been brought up, by the loving mother who hated me, to kill with the knife that had killed the man who should have been my father. My heart beat so fast that I feared I should faint or suffocate and die with my life's purpose unaccomplished. I gripped the haft of the knife beneath my blouse, the haft of the knife whose blade this barbarous German brute had driven into the throat of Jacques Duval, and which I was to drive into his own fat neck as I had been taught and trained to do.... Oh yes, taught and trained. Did I tell you how Madame ma mère daily practised my hand at knife-strokes? Never a pig was killed within miles of our village but I must be taken to see the doing of it, while I was a child, and to do it myself when old enough.

"No opportunity was I allowed to lose of driving my knife to the hilt in any dead animal, into anything in which a knife could be driven.

"I can hear her thin and bitter voice at this moment, see the wild glare in her eye as she gloated beside me while I stuck some neighbour's pig and the blood gushed warm into the blood-tub.

"'*Ohé*,' she would cry. '*Gobbets of flesh and gouts of gore*! So shalt thou bleed the foulest pig in all that Prussian sty, thine own father, thou accursed little devil. God and the Blessed Virgin reward and bless thee, my angel.' ...

"*Oui, mon vieux*, a strange upbringing for a child, *hein*?

"And when I first beheld him, my father, the foulest pig in all that Prussian sty, I looked at the spot beneath his ear where I should strike and bleed him as he bled Jacques Duval— ere I cut his throat from ear to ear, as he cut the throat of Jacques Duval."

Jean Rien closed his eyes and fell silent.

"Well, 'e might 'a finished 'is tile afore 'e 'opped it," remarked le Légionnaire 'Erbiggin, with apparent callousness, belied by his sympathetic, unhappy countenance. "So fur as I could onnerstan' 'im, 'e wos agoin' ter do 'is pore ol' farver in..... 'Ere, give 'im a suck o' this *bapédi*," he added, as he produced a small medicine bottle half-full of the fiery fig-spirit.

"No," replied John Bull; "only increase the bleeding, if he is not dead. All the better if he has fainted."

Jean Rien opened his eyes.

"I can scarcely see you, Père Jean Boule," he murmured. "It is as dark as it was in that room where he lay when at last I had him at my mercy.... Yes, at length, after months of weary waiting for my opportunity, months of practice at the burglars' trade, months of scheming and study of the big house where the Pettenkoferstrasse joins the Baseler Alee, he lay before me on his bed, the moon shining on his white face. The hour for which I had been in training for two-and-twenty years had struck. I crept from the window, by which I had

entered, to the door, and turned the key, praying that the noise might not awake him. It did not.

"I crept back to the bedside, raised my knife on high, shouted '*My Father*,' thrust his big head over to one side and, as I had done a thousand times in the course of my training, drove the knife home to the very hilt— and even as, in the one motion, my left hand turned his head and my right hand stabbed, I knew that I had struck a stark, rigid corpse!... He was dead and cold!... I laughed aloud."

Jean Rien laughed aloud and died.

9: Review: Jade of Destiny, 1931 (Jeffery Farnol)

Terry Walker

In: *A Century of Senational Fiction*, 2013
Placed in the public domain in 2013 by the author.

"In fine, sir, you are a mere bravo open to hire."
"Madam, your mistake, if allowable, is infinite. I am Dinwiddie!"

WHEN I FIRST went to high school in the big city, after a childhood in the Australian outback, I gleefully discovered the school library and its shelves of novels. Naturally it was stuff suitable for innocent pubescents in the equally innocent nineteen-fifties: Sabatini, Biggles, P. C. Wren, Richmal Crompton's William books, and so on. (The school library's fiction shelves were segregated into Boys' and Girls' sections, so I have no idea what the girls got to read: Enid Blyton, anyone?)

The library stocked several books by two confusingly similar sounding writers: Jeffery Farnol and J. Jefferson Farjeon. I'm sure I read one by Farjeon, which, I dimly remember, was a spy adventure set in a purely mythical Balkan country (Yugolatia?). Even at the age of 14 I knew the country was imaginary, and felt vaguely cheated. Then as now I preferred my fiction to be set in real locations, so I read only one of Farjeon's books. And confusing Farjeon and Farnol, I read none of Farnol's books at all.

Farnol

THAT WAS perhaps unfortunate, because Jeffery Farnol (1878-1952) was a sort of sub-Sabatini historical romance-adventure writer, whose target audience was fourteen-year-old boys of all ages. In his career he knocked out forty-plus sentimental, romantic swashbucklers starting with *My Lady Caprice* in 1907, and as a kid I didn't mind the occasional swashbuckler. I was also of the age to accept a modest dose of sentimental romance along with all that swashbuckling.

I would never have given Farnol another thought if it hadn't been for a scathing Clive James review of Erica Jong's historical novel *Fanny*, which he rather unfavourably compared with Farnol's pulp masterpiece *Jade of Destiny*. This brought Farnol to my attention again. Some time later I spotted a second-hand hardback copy of that self-same Farnol "masterpiece" for a dizzy $2.50, and, intrigued, I shelled out the shekels and took it home.

There was no publication date on the copyright page. My copy was obviously a reprint, probably from the late 1940s, because the list of Farnol's other titles includes much later books, but there's no reprint number or date either. Worse,

the long list of Farnol's other titles is entirely random, being in neither alphabetical nor chronological order.

Now that's something which really ticks me off. Sampson Low were not the only publishers to leave out publication dates; P G Wodehouse's hard-back publisher Herbert Jenkins was equally, infuriatingly, guilty of that sort of negligence. And publishers who list their authors' other titles in any order except chronological make me go *Aaaargh*!

Jocelyn Dinwiddie, soldier of fortune

Jade of Destiny is set in the reign of Good Queen Bess. The background is that Mary Queen of Scots is in captivity; die-hard Catholics are conspiring to overthrow the heretical, protestant Virgin Queen, put Mary Queen of Scots on the throne, and restore the Old Religion.

In the opening sentence we are introduced to the hero, Captain Jocelyn Dinwiddie, a flamboyant, gentle-born but down-at-heel soldier of fortune:

The Captain gave his battered hat the true swashbuckling cock, cast his ragged cloak about him with superb, braggadocio flourish, clashed his rusty spurs, and bowed.

And we're off and running. Farnol wasted no time on elaborate descriptions of his settings, nor detailed ruminations about his characters. On page 1 the egocentric but highly entertaining Dinwiddie, a battle-scarred veteran of the war against Spain in the Low Countries, is hired by the beauteous young Ione, Lady Fane to rescue her younger brother Richard, just nineteen, from the clutches of wicked friends in the Big City. On page 13 Dinwiddie and his travelling buddy Florian are engaged in rescuing a pretty young damsel from four lewd and drunken upper-class lechers at Ye Peck O' Malt Inn, with a vigorous snicker-snack of vorpal swordplay. By page 20 the steel is clashing yet again as the resourceful Dinwiddie catches Ione, Lady Fane's younger brother's "good friends" shamelessly cheating the lad with loaded dice and marked cards; and by page 25 the remorseful Richard is back home in Sussex.

"And so," said my lady, holding morsel of bread daintily above the lily pond where plump fish swam, "so you succeeded in this desperate emprise I set you."
"Madam,"answered the Captain, eyes furtively a'twinkle, "I am Dinwiddie!"

"I am Dinwiddie!" is the engaging Captain's invariable response to any suggestion of doubt about his capabilities in any field of endeavour whatsoever:

"These be notorious for deadly duellists all three, and you are but one!"
"Yet this same one is— Dinwiddie, madam!"

The beautiful Ione (Joan, actually) soon catches on:

"Indeed madam, for I am—"
"Oh, verily sir, you are Dinwiddie. I become aware o' this."

Of course, the rescue of young Richard is just the beginning. There follows a complicated story involving murder, spies, treason, the planned assassination of Queen Elizabeth, and a sinister, complex and devious plot against Ione, Lady Fane and her brother Richard. There are secret meetings in dungeons; ambushes; spies in the woodwork; Elizabeth's spymaster Walsingham shuffling human pawns; and Papist rebels lurking behind every tree.

In the end, of course, the magniloquent Dinwiddie brings it all off: he frustrates the assassination attempt, kills off assorted bad guys, discovers the identity of the murderer of Ione, Lady Fane's father ten years before and brings him to belated justice, terminates the plot against the Fanes, and even rescues Ione (a Catholic) from the wrath of the Queen. Good Queen Bess, much pleased by Dinwiddie's resourcefulness, gives the penniless gentleman adventurer a knighthood and an important (and doubtless well-paid) military job as Warden of the South Coast. And Dinwiddie, of course, wins the adorable Ione's hand.

It's all a great romp, with a complicated but lively plot, plenty of good humour, any amount of swashbuckling action and last minute rescues, and some very vivid, lively and memorable characters. What more could you ask?

Gadzooks, i'faith, prithee!

THE ONLY DRAWBACK is the dialogue.

Farnol belonged to the "Gadzooks, i'faith, prithee!" school of writing, and the characters talk to each other, often at length, in near incomprehensible mock-Tudor. Totally forgotten usages, such as "an" in the sense of "if", and the long extinct *-eth* inflection (cometh, killeth, sayeth, doeth), coupled with antiquated word order and a plethora of thees and thous, makes ploughing through the dialogue a considerable chore. It partly accounts for the lack of interest in Farnol these days. I mean, who really wants 200 pages of this, a sample chosen at random:

"Peace, boy!" said the Captain, refolding the letter and setting it back in his bosom. "Bleat not, thou poor shorn lamb, nor let tender gull, his pinions plucked so futile flap and flutter! In a word, lad, repine not thy squandered gold, count it but payment for experience shall make haply o' thee wiser youth nobler gentleman and kinder brother..."

It's rarely a good idea for novelists to write dialogue in heavy period dialect; the heavier it is, the harder it is to read, and it impedes the narrative. And the further you go back in time, the trickier it gets.

Take *Robin Hood*, for example. The 1990s Kevin Costner film of the ageless legend copped a lot of shrapnel from critics who complained, inter alia, that Robin Hood shouldn't have an American accent, and surely the word "twit" wasn't current in Robin's day. More recently Russell Crowe copped similar flak.

The fact is, though, that authentic dialogue would have needed sub-titles.

Robin, traditionally a Saxon Englishman who flourished c.1150 AD, couldn't speak English at all, because the English language as we know it didn't exist then. The "English" of the time, while misleadingly known by linguists as Old English, was still very close to the German then spoken in Saxony. Nor did Evil Prince John and the Sheriff of Nottingham speak English, either, modern or otherwise: they spoke Norman French.

Here is a short piece of genuine Old English dialogue from the Robin Hood period, and I'll bet you can't understand it:

"Leofre is us beon beswungen for laere thaenne his ne cunnan; ac we witten the bilewitne wesan, and nellan onbelaeden swingcla us, buto thu bi tongenydd fram us."

I don't want to read a novelisation of *Robin Hood* stuffed full of dialogue like that, thank you very much; and I don't want to strain my brain on thousand of words of mock-Tudor dialogue in Elizabethan-period novels either. The better historical novelists, like Georgette Heyer and Rafael Sabatini, got it about right: modern English but avoiding obvious 20th century slang; and with just sufficient of the more self-evident period slang and idiom to suggest the whole.

For all that, *The Jade of Destiny* is good fun, and I have since read it again, finding that the awful dialogue is a bit easier to cope with second time around.

I have also dug up a few more Farnol novels, and was not surprised to discover that Clive James got it right when he described this book as Farnol's "masterpiece". Farnol had a powerful tendency to really saccharine sentimentality, laid on with a shovel. *The Jade of Destiny* is relatively free of it, so you don't get that slightly queasy, cross-Channel-ferry-in-a-storm stomach which is the usual symptom of reading a Farnol these days.

10: The Gray Wolf

H. Bedford-Jones

1887-1949

Short Stories, 25 Feb 1933

Bill Harper, investigative journalist, appeared in a series of international intrigue adventure stories in the early 1930s

LEAVING Simpson's in the Strand, that goal of epicures who desire a meal regardless of price, Harper lit his pipe and strolled toward Temple Bar.

For once he was unhurried. His business in London was finished. With evening he would get the night boat back to France, once more Paris correspondent for his chain of papers. He neared Temple Bar. Then as he neared the dark little entrance to the grounds, supposedly open only to members of this legal fraternity, Harper came to a startled halt.

Directly before him, negligently leaning on a stick at the curb as though waiting for a taxicab, was the Gray Wolf.

Harper's pulses leaped. No doubt whatever! *Le Loup Gris*— the Gray Wolf, who ate little girls! That ghastly joke had lingered in his mind, Here was the maa whom the police of Berlin, of Paris, of Antwerp, were seeking. He was known only as the Gray Wolf. His name, his nationality, were cloaked in mystery.

True, the mustache was now gone and a monocle was screwed into his right eye, but Harper could not mistake. He had too often studied the photograph, insolently inscribed from the Gray Wolf, found in the apartment of that American girl in Paris. The girl was now dead, the photograph, broadcast to all police, had never been traced, The story was old and stale. But for Harper, here was a new story, a big story, a thrilling one!

"Same curve of the lip," he reflected. "Same peculiar droop of that left eyelid in profile; the monocle changes it unless one were looking for it. That's why he wears the monocle, of course! And the gray hair like silver, which they all described; handsomely dressed, all gray from Homburg to spats, perfectly groomed— "

Nine out of ten men would have hesitated, feared to take a long chance. Harper was the tenth man. He knew he was right. He knew there was no long chance whatever. And he knew that an authentic interview with the Gray Wolf would be catapulted into the front page of every Continental newspaper. Not into those of the sedate English papers, which were given over to advertising.

All this flickered through his brain in an instant, and then, plucking out one of his cards, he stepped up to the man on the curb.

"I beg your pardon," he said quietly. "Here's my card. I'd like to get an interview with you in regard to the death of Elie Ferguson last month, in Paris."

The other turned, stared blankly at him, and spoke in French.

"I regret, m'sieu, that I am a stranger here and do not— your language— "

"That's all right, never mind any bluff," returned Harper in French, "You heard me the first time. I'm a newspaper man, not a policeman. Give me the interview, and I'll wait one hour before laying my information before the police. Refuse, and we'll start raising merry hell right here and now."

An ugly mouth like a parrot's beak, fully revealed now that the mustache was gone; two brilliant, piercing gray eyes, and a hawk nose above the cleft chin— this was the face that met Harper's cool and steady regard. The brilliant eyes probed him, then the man took the card and glanced at it.

For this man, too, the instant must have been one of swift decision. An instant of tragic uncertainty, of quick and horrible appraisal. How much did this newspaper hawk know? On the instant hung evetything; but so steady, so confident, was Harper's manner that any gallows-gamble looked like a very poor chance,

"Agreed, Mr. Harper," came the answer, in English. "There will be some things which I'll not care to discuss— "

"Oh, that's fair enough! We'll spare your feelings," said Harper drily. "Shall we step into the Temple, here? You're a cool one, ali right! But I'll play square with you."

"So I decided, from your looks," returned the Gray Wolf, as they stepped through from the street into the cool green gardens of the Temple close. A thin smile curved the ugly lips, and the murderer twirled his stick airily. Harper did not observe that the vendor of newspapers in the passage, catching this gesture and one sharp look from the Gray Wolf, went hurriedly out into the Strand, waving a newspaper excitedly.

Thus, in the historic enclosure in the heart of old London, began the most fantastic interview in all of Harper's newsgathering experience. Harper had chosen his part deliberately but not carelessly, With no policeman in sight, any effort to apprehend the Gray Wolf must be futile. But during the interview, Harper expected to learn information of the utmost value to the police.

"First," he said casually, "let me ask whether you killed Miss Ferguson?"

"I did not," said the Gray Wolf coolly. "The police are fools! I sent them a telegram giving the name of the murderer. They suppressed it, tried to fasten the crime on me."

"All right, shoot the works," said Harper. On the immaculately kept nails was no mark, but in the whorls of the fingers themselves showed brown stain. The man was an amateur photographer, then. This was why the picture had not been traced.

"Who did it, if not you?"

"Baron Corvo."

Harper whistled, "The racing chap? The biggest all-around sport in Paris—"

"Exactly. Corvo was trying to shoot me—"

The Gray Wolf launched into a sordid narrative of extortion. He spoke rapidly, without emotion, as though discussing some impersonal matter. His eyes drove here and there as though he sought someone among the men who passed along the paths, Harper, too, was using his eyes, while his brain jotted down mental notes of the unfolded story. A vain man, this, who had refused to dye his silver-gray hair and brows; the gray did not come from age, however. The Gray Wolf could not be over forty. A gentleman. That is to say, a man of education, refinement, culture. No jewelry. French clothes, And on the silver band encircling the Malacca stick, the graven initials J. S.

THE Gray Wolf refused to discuss past murders. He did not conceal the fact that he had been in the extortion business for a long time. He spoke of his past callously, yet with a crafty evasion. He discussed the police of various capitals with scathing cynicism and exact knowledge. He showed swift interest in how Harper had recognized him, and Harper did not hesitate to elaborate slightly on the truth, giving the impression that he knew a good deal more about the Gray Wolf than he said.

Suddenly the Gray Wolf glanced at his watch, perhaps to hide the expression of swift relief that had come into his face.

"Time's up," he said. "Are you satisfied, Mr. Harper?"

"Thank you, yes." Harper extended another of his cards, with a fountain pen. "I need some confirmation of this interview. Jot it down, if you don't mind, that you've given it to me. You must trust me to repeat exactly what you've said, nothing else. You have my word on it."

"That's good with me," said the other, with a nod. "I know the right type of newspaper man when I meet him. There you are. One full hour, you said?"

"To the minute," replied Harper. "I'll get off my story and then go to Scotland Yard, Suit you?"

"Excellently, thanks. Good day."

Harper watched the man stride away, not back toward the Strand, but down toward the Embankment. He glanced at the card, found the brief note he had required, and the signature of Le Loup Gris. A smile touched his lips.

"Slipped one over on him there, eh?" he reflected. "French, but the letters aren't formed as the French write them. His English accent is natural and not assumed. But he called me a newspaper man instead of a journalist; and said, "That's good with me!"— a phrase no Britisher would use. What's the answer?

"Obviously, an Englishman of good blood who went to America and lived there. A crook of the worst type. He passes as a gentleman, probably is ultra-respectable and so forth, May live on the Continent as an English tourist, like

thousands of others. He's no fool, either. He'll know that England is too hot to hold him now, and he'll slip away with a real disguise. And now for the cables! I'll get the story off first, so the ee won't stop it, then slip around to Scotland Yard and spill everything."

He came out again into the Strand, caught a passing taxicab, and ten minutes later was seated in the cable office, dashing off copy rapidly. The excitement of it thrilled him, drove everything else out of his head.

TO THE average eye, Harper was a young man in a business suit. Perhaps he was no more, even to the super-average eye of the Gray Wolf; but it did not occur to him that he was taking long chances in dealing with that gentleman. Little he would have cared, for Harper was not conservative by a good deal. In fact, he usually scandalized his conservative colleagues and enjoyed it.

His story finished and on the wire— he would not trust even the London office of his own syndicate with such a story— he glanced at his watch. Five minutes left before the hour was up. Scotland Yard was not far, but he wanted to arrive by car for the sake of appearances. Also, a taxi would slip him around there in two minutes.

He dashed out. At the curb, a taxi-driver was enjoying a heated argument with his late fare over the size of a tip. Harper cut it short.

"Scotland Yard, and sharp about it," he ordered, and got in. The driver touched his cap, slewed his cumbrous vehicle out into traffic, and started down toward Whitehall. Harper sank back on the cushions, absorbed in thought of the coming interview. The officials would be furious, of course, but they would have to like it. And after all, he had information for them that no one else had ever supplied.

He started suddenly. Instead of turning toward Whitehall Court, the taxi made a sharp swing off to the left, to pass beneath Charing Cross viaduct. Harper leaned forward and rapped sharply on the glass. The driver turned in to the curb, underneath the atch of masonry, and halted.

The cab doors to right and left were jerked open, and two men darted in.

The thing was incredible— here in the heart of the world's most law-abiding city, in broad daylight! Harper wakened abruptly to the reality of it, as a "persuader" swung for his head and knocked him backward. His foot drove up; caught under the chin, the man with the slungshot sprawled back into the street head first.

Harper, however, had gone into the arms of the second man. A wet cloth was flung about his face. The odor of ether stifled him. He fought desperately, savagely. A howl broke from the man above as Harper's thumb found his eye and gouged it from the socket, A sharp command, a blow in the stomach, a second thudding crack as the slungshot came down on his head.

"Damn your dirty hide, you Gray Wolf!" he thought, and then everything slipped into darkness.

ii

IN ONE of those charmingly retired houses which dot the Surrey countryside near London, two men sat looking out over the garden and tennis-court, upon which the weeds had made.sad inroads.

One of the two, just arrived by motor, was short and fat, with a heavy jaw, a heavy black mustache, an air of sleek prosperity and an expression which was anything but benevolent. He was speaking with a worried and anxious manner.

"But, my dear Sir James, I tell you that Moreland has killed himself! It is in all the morning papers, He will pay nothing further."

The other man laughed a little.

"Come, come, Dumond! Speak French only, remember; you must think of the servants. Never mind what the papers say about Moreland. Tell me why you killed him?"

Dumond met the brilliant, piercing eyes of Sir James Santerre, and mopped perspiration from his forehead, Although the morning was cool as yet, he seemed unwontedly bedewed with perspiration. Perhaps it was the look in those cold gray eyes that waked his agitation.

Cold they were, unwinking, steady, like the eyes of a reptile. The mouth was hidden by a ragged brownish mustache. The clipped hair was brown, like the bushy brows. The face was singularly unlined, almost youthful, harshly carven, strong.

"He— he attacked me," stammered Dumond. "He said that it was ended, that he would— "

Again Santerre laughed.

"Lucky for you, Dumond, that you acted so promptly and efficiently yesterday! Come, now. The truth about Moreland is that you killed him, and you intended to hold out on me— that is, to keep the thovsand pounds he paid you. Come!" The voice sharpened abruptly. "Confess it, and no harm's done. You thought I'd be too taken up with other matters to pay any attention, That was human. I don't blame you a particle. We all make mistakes, you know."

"*Peste*! You are the very devil," grumbled Dumond sullenly, fear in his eyes. "Yes. I'm not the one to carry it through. Here is the money."

He produced a sheaf of black and white Bank of England notes which Santerre took and tossed negligently on the table.

"Very well; let us forget the mistake," he said, so that Dumond sank back in his chair with relief. "Now, I want to ask you something. You know the

photograph which became public in Paris? How did that man Harper recognize me from it?"

"By chance," said Dumond promptly. "One of those chances that occur— and also because he is an SOE person. I have made inquiries about him, He is dangerous. He would no doubt recognize you as you now are. He is that sort."

"Nothing in the papers about him?"

DUMOND shook his head.

"Too soon. His disappearance will not be realized for another day or so. You have seen the article he wrote? It appeared this morning in the *Post* alone, relayed by the Continental service."

"I saw it," replied Santerre calmly. "I could not prevent its publication; it was the price I had to pay for being recognized. But I stopped this man reaching the police,"

"You mean, I stopped him."

"Exactly. That is why you are now alive, after your attempted cleverness with the Moreland affair."

Dumond shrank a little in his chair.

"England is dangerous for you now, m'sieu."

"By this time tomorrow it will be dangerous," corrected the Gray Wolf. From the table he took a blue telegraphic form. "A wire just arrived from Chartres, in whose name the Blonville villa stands. He opened it yesterday. All is ready for us there."

Sharp admiration leaped into the eyes of Dumond.

"But— but you foresee everything! Even before it happens!"

"As I foresaw your bungling with Moreland." The Gray Wolf took a notebook from his pocket, opened it, consulted it. "At Lloyd's Bank you still have three thousand pounds on deposit in your name. Go back to the city at once. Withdraw this amount and close out the account. Book two of the large first-class cabins on the Southampton boat to Havre, for tonight, in your name. Present your physician's card and say that you are traveling with two patients, one of them Sir James Santerre, to the French coast. One patient is an ambulance case. You want special attention at the boat-train; pay well for it. You comprehend?"

Dumond, who was actually a doctor by profession, nodded.

"The number in the party, m'sieu?"

"Your two patients, yourself, two attendants; Jacques and Farquarson, to be precise. The name of the ambulance patient is Richard Masterson."

"He will require a passport."

Santerre produced a blue British passport and extended it. Dumond opened it, and his jaw dropped. Then he gave Santerre a sharp glance, and grinned.

"Oh, I see! The man who died suddenly last year! But Harper does not look like him."

"Your patient suffers from cancer of the mouth, requiring bandages."

"Of course, of course; your pardon." Dumond returned the passport, "But the French police will have seen that newspaper story— "

"We shall not be in Paris. At Deauville and the vicinity, we deal with provincial police alone, where I am well known and respected, Does anything else worry your profound brain?"

"Yes," said Dumond, who was possessed of a certain stubborn quality. "I do not like the fact of your initials being published."

"Within two weeks," said the other, "a man whose name holds those initials and who answers my description, will be found dead in Deauville. The Gray Wolf will die with him. This matter shall have my sole attention. Are you satisfied?"

"Yes," returned the other slowly, thoughtfully. Santerre broke into a laugh.

"My dear doctor, you are a rascal, you would like to cheat me, you are a coward — and yet I find you invaluable! Your wits, your queries, your objections, overlook nothing. On the table there is the thousand pounds from Moreland, which you desired to steal from me, Take it. The money is yours. Meet us at the boattrain tonight without fail."

Overcome with astonishment and delight, Dumond took the sheaf of banknotes, pressed the hand of Sir James Santerre, and departed.

LEFT alone, the Gray Wolf stepped out into the hall, struck a gong hanging there, and came back into the parlor. He lit a cigar and looked at the garden outside, brilliant in the morning sunlight, until the door opened to admit a burly man with a shock head of red hair and eyes of pale, almost colorless blue.

"Ah, Farquarson! Shut the door and come over here," said Sir James. "The patient?"

"He's trying to bribe Jacques, sir," answered Farquarson. A shadowy smile touched the lips of the Gray Wolf.

"Indeed! Well, I'll attend to him myself in a few minutes. We leave tonight for France. You have not been to the Normandy villa before."

"No, sit."

"We go to Havre by the over-night boat. Opposite Havre, at the mouth of the Seine, lies Deauville, with its attendant chain of resorts and villages. One of these is Blonville, a few miles down the coast. Chartres, whom you met in Paris, has opened our villa there. The patient goes with us, insensible and unresisting, in charge of Dr. Dumond."

"Yes, sir," said Farquarson with admirable reticence.

The Gray Wolf puffed at his cigar for a moment, took it from his mouth, eyed it critically, then lifted his cold, brilliant gaze to the pale eyes of Farquarson.

"Go up to London by the next train. Go to the Savoy Hotel and register as Jasper Stanton of New York; take with you the unmarked black suitcase, place in it two or three books and some of those Ametican magazines from the library. At precisely four o'clock you will have a visitor. Do you comprehend?"

"Perfectly, sir," returned the immovable Farquarson.

"This visitor is a gentleman whom I believe you know, or knew. He is Colonel Hamilton Cecil, retired."

The pallid eyes flashed for an instant with a terrible light.

"He was sitting as magistrate, sir, when I was convicted."

"Exactly. He will not know you again, but you will know him. He will tell you that he has been unable to raise the money demanded, but that he has a part of the sum. Take it from him, and then kill him — silently. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Farquarson, and his eyes flashed again.

"I would remind you, Farquarson, that not two murders a year in London go unsolved. It would be a pity to spoil the record of the Metropolitan force. Therefore," and Sir James extended a small photograph, "leave this on the floor beside Cecil's body, so the crime will be assigned to the Gray Wolf."

Farquarson took the photograph and eyed it, frowningly.

"Why, sir— this is you, but it isn't you!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "That is, you haven't this scar, or this queer-shaped ear— "

Sir James laughed heartily. "Right, my man, right! Thank heaven I haven't either of those marks; but the photograph has. Further, it has other marks. I recommend it to you as a study in the art of photography, Farquarson. Now, is every detail certain in your excellent brain?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. When you have paid your old debt to Colonel Cecil, abandon your bag, leave the hotel, and amuse yourself until the Southampton boat-train leaves. Meet us at the station for that train, with your passport, fifteen minutes before leaving time. That's all."

"Very good, sir," and Farquarson withdrew.

Sir James Santerre looked out at the garden, puffed at his cigar, and smiled a little.

"Yes," he murmured, "by this time tomorrow England might be rather unsafe for me, but it will be positively dangerous for the Gray Wolf— so beautifully and unmistakably described in that signed photograph! And the longer. and more ardently that gentleman is sought by the police here and abroad, the more safe I myself am. Decidedly, I think I've drawn a red herting across the trail blazed by that fool Harper. Which reminds me; I'd better see him at once."

And laying down his cigar with a sigh, he came to his feet.

iii

HARPER looked up sharply at his visitor.

"Come around, have you?" said the Gray Wolf, "I trust you enjoyed your breakfast? All right, Jacques. You may go for the present, until I ring."

Jacques, a lean, dark-faced man in whites, left the room. The Gray Wolf came to the bed and sat down on the edge, regarding Harper attentively.

"You know me?"

Harper laughed shortly, "Do you think a false mustache and a little hair-dye would fool anyone?"

"No, I'm afraid not," and the other smiled. "You had no luck bribing Jacques, eh? Poor fellows, my associates ate held to me by stronger bonds than money. Particularly Jacques, whose chief aim and end in life is to receive a regular supply of the drug vulgarly known as snow. I fear that mere money would not interest him."

Harper met those brilliant, icy eyes and felt his own helplessness acutely. Each wrist and ankle was handcuffed to a corner of the brass bed in which he lay. He had long since given over any futile struggles.

"You're a fine double-crosser, aren't you?" he retorted. "A real sport, eh?"

The Gray Wolf looked faintly amused.

"Tut, tut, don't act like a little boy, my dear Mr. Harper! Remember, you forced your attentions on me; and self-preservation is the first law of nature. Will you kindly inform me how you happened to know that the Gray Wolf was in England? Or was your recognition purely a chance matter, as my chief assistant believes?"

Harper had no intention whatever of sticking to the truth. He was grasping at any straw offered, and seized on this one instantly.

"The encounter was sheer luck, of course," he replied. "The fact that you were known to be in England and operating here, however, had me on the lookout. Satisfied?"

The piercing eyes narrowed; the shaft had gone home.

"The fact that I was known— but that's impossible!' exclaimed the Gray Wolf sharply.

"Don't talk like a little boy, Gray Wolf!" said Harper in mocking accents. "One of your own men squealed on you in Paris, or so I understand. You didn't know it?"

"Indeed? And just how did that happen? Who was the man?"

"Find out for yourself," retorted Harper. A flame leaped in the brilliant eyes.

"You're lying, Harper!"

"Suit yourself. Probably I am, of course."

"Hm! You, a correspondent, would know," mused the Gray Wolf. Then he stood up. "Well, I cannot bother with the matter at present. We'll put you ae a thorough inquiry tomorrow, my friend."

The tone in which these words were uttered, the glance that accompanied them, sent a sudden icy shiver through Harper. But a thin smile touched his lips as he met the gray gaze of the man above.

"Anything you screw out of me, you're welcome to," he returned, "I suppose you'd like to know about the letter from Elie Ferguson, too!"

The Gray Wolf stood as though frozen for an instant, staring down. There had been no letter from that unfortunate woman, of course— yet Harper's tone was confident, assured.

"Upon my word," said the Gray Wolf slowly, "I believe you will be worth questioning!"'

Harper laughed mockingly, but the other turned and left the room at once.

LEFT alone, Harper made another effort to get a wrist loose; quite futile. He had been stripped, put into bed, and ironed there. To all intents and purposes he was a hospital patient. The man Jacques was his attendant. He had learned the folly of trying to bribe that saturnine Jacques, too, even before the Gray Wolf showed up. A snowbird, eh? The fellow looked it. French, to boot; a cruel, pallid, dark-haired face.

Presently Jacques came back into the room, sat down with a book, and quite ignored the prisoner. He refused to talk of answer questions. When a maid brought up a luncheon tray, he took it at the door and fed Harper in silence. He might have been a deaf mute so far as his manner went.

Harper did no shouting. Common sense told him it would be folly.

The time dragged horribly. Nothing happened; Jacques read on in silence. Three o'clock, four o'clock. Then the door opened and the Gray Wolf strode into the room, He came to the bedside and regarded Harper for a moment, smiling, showed Harper his watch,

"You see the hour? Jacques, let us see your watch."

Jacques came close, bared his wrist. It was precisely four o'clock by his watch also.

"Free the right wrist of the patient, Jacques."

Harper's right hand was freed. The Gray Wolf handed him a fountain pen, held up a sheet of paper on a book before him.

"Write and sign a statement that I was in your presence at this hour. You have no reason to doubt that it is the correct time. There is also the clock above the fireplace, which you have probably been watching."

This was true.

"Why should I do this?" demanded Harper.

"Because I wish it," replied the Gray Wolf coldly. "It will save you considerable pain."

Harper shrugged and complied. At a motion from the Gray Wolf, who folded and pocketed the paper, Jacques again ironed Harpet's wrist to the bed-post.

"This is part of my future insurance," observed the Gray Wolf. "Were you to read the papers tomorrow, you would see that a man was killed at this hour today at the Savoy Hotel, by the Gray Wolf. Later, the police will receive this note— several days later. There is nothing like confusing our good police, in the right manner, and at the proper time. Now, Mr. Harper, you are going on a journey. Your wakening will be pleasant, I trust. Jacques! The hypodermic case

What now transpired was like a nightmare scene to Harper.

He saw the Gray Wolf carefully sit down to a table and prepare a load for the hypodermic that Jacques fitted together and cleansed for him. The knowledge that this man was about to turn him from a thinking machine into a senseless, drugged semblance of a man was filled with unspeakable horror.

Only by an iron effort did Harper keep his head, remain silent, repress the frantic desire to shout, to struggle against the inevitable. He was powerless to help himself, and realizing it, exerted all his willpower to restrain the desperate, insane impulses that tore and wrenched at him.

When he was ready, the Gray Wolf rose and came to the bedside, looking down at Harper. "Damn you!" said the latter with a calm, quiet force that was like a blow. "Somehow, somewhere, I'll get you for this— "

The Gray Wolf smiled.

"Others have said the same, my friend," he rejoined. "The right wrist, Jacques!"

Jacques seized upon Harper's bare arm, swabbed at the forearm with alcohol, held it motionless in his two hands, Harper could not reach him with his teeth, and had no other available weapon. The Gray Wolf leaned over, inserted the needle, and emptied the contents of the syringe into the blood-stream.

"In twenty minutes," he said to Jacques, "you will prepare him for the journey. Farquarson joins us at the station, with Dumond. We leave here in half an hour."

Both men departed, and Harper found himself alone, his eyes on the clock, waiting.

Farquarson! That would be the redheaded devil whom he had seen early in the morning. Dumond? A mere name, but he tucked it away in his brain. He watched the clock, watched the hands creeping gradually, insensibly—

In precisely twenty minutes he was sleeping soundly.

HARPER's waking came quietly, gradually, to sunshine playing on a distant horizon of sea, He became aware that he was in a different room, whose

windows overlooked the sea; where? Morning sunlight— then the next day had arrived,

"Not awake yet, Farquarson?" came the cold voice of the Gray Wolf. Instantly, Harper closed his eyes, relaxed, lay breathing quietly.

"He hasn't stirred, sir. Getting on to noon, too," was the response.

"Yes; I gave him a stiff dose. However, he'll come out of it wide awake and little the worse, so be on your guard, Ten or fifteen minutes after waking, he'll be himself. Don't waste time. As soon as he stirs, iron him securely. You understand?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"The morning papers from Havre came in a short time ago," went on the Gray Wolf. "You did an excellent job yesterday, Farquarson; every detail was perfect. The story Harper sent out has been shoved into the background already. You're the one man upon whom I can rely to obey otders to the letter."

"Thank you, sir," returned Farquarson's stolid voice. "I've waited a long while to settle with Colonel Cecil, sir. And if I might make so bold, Sir James— "

"Well?"

"Him, over there. Why not get rid of him quickly?"

"Because we must first make him talk. We'll do that tonight. I'm going to Deauville now with Dumond, for luncheon. Chartres will remain here. Jacques will drive us— his wife's the general maid here, you know. She's one of us, and quite safe."

"Yes, sir. Why not iron this Harper at once, before he wakes up?"

"As you like. Not a half bad idea, in fact. Good-by! See you later."

A door slammed.

Harper half opened his lids, stole a look about. At the moment he could see nothing of Farquarson, but the man's last words filled him with alarm. Once ironed to the bed, he knew full well how helpless he would be.

Every word uttered had been quite clear. His brain was acute, entirely itself; a tumult of thoughts, impulses, eager conjectures, rushed through his mind all in an instant, Deauville! Then this house must be close by on the French coast, and he was looking out at the Atlantic. And he was free to act, momentarily, but not for long. He heard a jingle of steel chain, realized that Farquarson must be getting the handcuffs to secure him.

A stumpy French fishing craft with a red sail came crawling across the water. Harper thought of London, of the man murdered at four o'clock the previous day. No more than a day had passed. And Farquarson had done that job, evidently. A murderer like his master.

A FIGURE moved in front and blocked everything from his sight. The red-haired Farquarson stooped above him, the abnormally pale eyes hideous and

terrible to see. The man reached out for one of Harper's wrists, a handcuff ready to snap, three others on the bed ready.

Like a flash, Harper's other hand shot up. His fingers clenched about that sinewy throat, What was more important, they went in deep before Farquarson's muscles could become rigid; they gripped about the windpipe and sank into the flesh— fingers like iron.

A strangled sound broke from Farquarson.

Harper writhed about, drew the other down beside him on the bed. In that first instant of surprise and shock, Farquarson let fall the handcuffs. His heavy fists beat at Harper, but he had been drawn too close for the blows to find force. They were blind, furious blows; frantic with panic. The man was struggling like a chicken whose head was gone.

Not for long, however.

The two lay side by side, all Harper's faculties concentrated on keeping that iron grip about the other's windpipe. He clung on grimly, putting into his hand every atom of energy, of will-power, he possessed.

Then a terrific shock rocked him, and another. Farquarson had gained a desperate and awful calm, had ceased to struggle, was holding a pair of the handcuffs, swinging them in a short arc with frightful force. But the grip about his throat never relaxed. Harper was still half-conscious rapidly slipping but exerting all his will to hold on.

Farquarson's body moved convulsively, then lay quiet, quivering. After all, he had won his fight, for now the fingers of Harper relaxed. But he had won his fight too late.

When, some time afterward, Harper opened his eyes, he stared into the dead face of Farquarson lying beside him, The sight fetched him to his senses quickly enough.

iv

AFTER a little Harper sat up, barely repressing a groan.

He staggered to his feet, stepped out, and only his grip at a chair kept him from falling. He stared at his reflection in a mirror, and his eyes distended, incredulity clutching at him.

He was naked. The hospital gown he had worn, had been torn away in the struggle with Farquarson. Blood was streaming down the right side of his face; the irons had gashed his skull repeatedly. And his face itself was like death, He knew now that he had become very weak. He could only sink into the chair and try to hang on.

True, strength had flowed into him for the moment. All the energy of his being had been tensed, his whole spirit concentrated, in that one supreme

eftort, He had to overcome Farquarson or go under, with never another chance; and he had won.

The price, however, was terrific. He was limp as a wet rag; all force was gone out of him,

Presently he rallied, spurred himself to rise and move about. A bathroom showed to one side, with all the incredibly primitive and exposed plumbing of a French country villa. Harper gained it, bathed his head, found that the bleeding had stopped. Then, as he tenderly toweled his hair, he became conscious of a reiterated knocking at a door opposite, and a woman's voice in accented English.

"Are you gone to sleep? Here is luncheon!"

The wife of Jacques, then!

"Leave it," growled Harper, trying to imitate the rough, stolid tones of Farquarson, "Leave it, miss. I'm changing my clothes."

"*Je m'en fiche*," came the impudent retort. "*Sale Anglais*! I leave it, then."

"Thank the Lord!" muttered Harper.

Somehow he got across the room. The Gray Wolf had prophesied amiss about the effect of the drug departing. He could not control his feet, he felt dizzy, wretched, weak. Pausing at the bed, he drew the silken coverlet over the figure there, leaned forward and felt the pockets. No weapon.

Disappointed, he came to the door, opened it, saw a tray on the floor outside. With a frightful effort he carried it in and laid it on the table, then closed and locked the door. A moment later he dropped into a chair beside the table, unable to make any movement whatever. He was somnolent, drowsy. His lids weighed like lead.

Jerking his head up, he looked about. The room was pleasant, luxuriously furnished, and outside the long closed windows was a little balcony. Below showed a garden, a hedge on either hand, running down a slope toward the sea. popes reached out, fumbled at the pot of coffee, poured some with shaking hand, and gulped it down.This helped him instantly.

AN UPSTAIRS room of some villa along the coast, near Houlgat or Blonville, doubtless. And the Gray Wolf had brought him here from London, overnight A certain blank astonishment seized upon Harper, then he shrugged and dismissed the matter.

He drank more of the bitter coffee, ate a roll, felt more like himself. When he tried to walk across to the windows, however, he realized how terribly that drug must have sapped his physical strength. He got a window open and drank in the fresh sunlit air, gratefully.

Noon, and in an hour or two the Gray Wolf would be back. Now was his time, if ever, to reach a telephone and drag in the police. A simple matter, to all appearance.

There was very probably no telephone in the villa, for in France telephones are rare and precious things. And to get out of the place, he must have clothes.

A glance showed no clothes in the room. An armoire near the window revealed only women's dresses and aprons, He glanced at the heap on the bed, but the idea was revolting. Cursing the dizziness that assailed him, Harper procured a towel from the bathroom and knotted it about his waist. Going forth naked and weaponless— the thought drew a grim smile to his lips, as he approached the door where the tray had been left. Outside, he knew, was a hallway.

The coast was clear. He closed the door, locked it, and removed the key. Crossing to an opposite door, he found it and unlocked and entered. A sunny corner room, this, and very handsome; a man's room, which raised his hopes. On the dresser stood an unopened envelope which had probably just arrived and been brought by the maid who fetched the lunch-tray.

As Harper crossed the room to the dresser, a whirl of dizziness and nausea assailed him, He all but fell; his head swimming, he clutched weakly at the dresser for support. After an instant his eyes cleared. The letter before him was addressed to Sir James Santerre, Bart., Villa Beausolil, Blonville.

So he was in the room of the Gray Wolf— and had learned his name!

Sharp and savage exultation thrilled through him, banished his weakness, drew a laugh to his lips. Sir James Santerre, eh? He seized the envelope and tore it open. A check for five thousand francs fell out, and with it, in a woman's hand, a letter. He glanced at it. *My darling: I am awaiting the moment of our reunion with trembling heart—*

Harper grimaced, then read through the ardent epistle. It revealed, as nothing else could have done, the callous, inhuman bestiality of the Gray Wolf. A married woman, this, of good position; and the Ferguson girl, too, had been of an excellent family. Here were love and extortion mingled in a cold-blooded, brutally revolting scheme that all too frequently ended in murder when the victim was bled white.

Putting down the letter, which rather sickened him with its implications, Harper turned. A trunk and suitcase stood open, half emptied. A high Norman armoire against the wall revealed clothes neatly arranged, and as the Gray Wolf was of a size with Harper, the most pressing problem was solved.

Despite the recurrent nausea, Harper was dressed within ten minutes, picking out a light and loose tweed that fitted him fairly well. To his disappointment, however, he discovered no weapons of any kind in the room, The maid was the wife of Jacques, and while he knew nothing about Chartres,

who must be somewhere about, he had no illusions as to the character of the Gray Wolf's associates. Either of those two would take some handling, and he was in no shape to tackle the jab.

"However, nothing venture, nothing win!" he reflected more cheerfully, as he surveyed himself in the glass. "Blonville's only two or three miles from Deauville, if I recollect aright. Now a cap, to cover up my head— "

Thus complete, even to a wad of French money that lay on the dresser, Harper reconnoitered the hall, which was empty, and the position of the house, This, he found, was just off a road, probably the main highway, for he caught sight of a passing autobus over the top of the hedge. Within this hedge, in the thorough French fashion, was an iron fence. He had only to walk out the gates and find himself at liberty. Blonville being a mere dot on the map, a commune spread across the coastal hills, he was not apt to find any police here. Deauville would be his best bet, he reflected.

He pulled the cap over his eyes, turned to the stairs— and then shrank hastily aside. From the hall below, at the foot of the staircase, came steps and a man's voice in rapid, urgent French,

"Quick, Therese? Who is it? Why did you bring anyone in?"

"But, m'sieu, she forced her way! I could not stop her!" came the voice of the maid. "She said that she knew Sir James was here and— "

"Who is she?" snapped Chartres.

"A Mlle Mills, an American— "

From Chartres broke a sharp oath.

"Impossible! We finished with that one two months ago, at Nice! She went back to America— she could not possibly be that fool blonde!"

"This is not a blonde, m'sieu. She is dark and petite. She sent away her car— "

"Where is she, then?"

"In the library."

"Good!" exclaimed Chartres. "I will go down the road to the *Bureau de Poste* and telephone the casino, Perhaps I can catch the patron there. Give her wine at once— from the green decanter. That will keep her quiet Tell her Sir James will be here in a few minutes, Wihy the devil must she come: when he is away? Go quickly!"

HARPER whistled to himself. Mills! He remembered something about that case; a woman from home who got into trouble at Nice. She had lost a lot of money at Monte Carlo, Her husband was in the diplomatic service. Nasty rumors about it. No one knew just what. So there was another victim of the Gray Wolf, eh? Yet this could not be same woman. Perhaps some relative, And if she drank that drugged wine—

Harper started down the stairs impulsively, forgetting everything except the necessity of warning this compatriot, getting her out of the spider's web. Then, halfway down, vertigo seized upon him, His head swam. Violent nausea attacked him and he all but slipped headlong to the bottom of the stairs, However, he got down safely, clung to the newel-post, and stood there weakly, shakily, looking around.

And at this moment, as he waited, a door six feet away opened. Out into the hall came a swarthy woman in maid's uniform, bearing a tray. At sight of Harper she stopped short, and her eyes widened in sharp astonishment. Quick as thought, Hatper turned to her with a gesture of caution.

"You're Therese? I met Chartres; I'm one of the Paris crowd. You've got wine there from the green decanter? Take it back. Let me handle this woman. Instead, bring us some ordinary wine in two minutes. You understand? Any kind of wine— but not from that decanter."

It was at once obvious that this woman had not seen the patient.

"Yes— but yes," she stammered. "But how do I know— the *patron*—"

"I saw Sir James at Deauville; also your husband," and Harper laughed. Her face cleared at once. He made an imperative gesture, and she turned back. "Wait! This woman is in the library? Which door?"

"There, across the hall."

Harper nodded and went to the door she indicated. He paused briefly, to glance back and see that she had obeyed him; then he opened the door and stepped into the room beyond.

He was astonished at its air of luxury, but his eyes went at once to the woman who stood by the table. She had not heard his swift, quiet entry. She was standing there, looking up at a glorious Zuloaga portrait above the fireplace— a rather small woman, dark, her face strangely pathetic and sad. She was perhaps thirty, Harper figured swiftly.

Then she was aware of him, as he strode toward her.

A little gasp broke from her. She turned about swiftly, with catlike grace, and Harper was startled by the blaze of fury in her eyes.

"You unspeakable monster!" she cried out in a shrill, nervous voice. "I've learned everything— my sister has told me everything! And now I've found you—"

Her hand jerked up a small pistol, and she fired pointblank. At the same instant, Harper was aware of the roar of a motor engine, and through the open windows caught the sound of the Gray Wolf's cold voice.

Sir James had returned home.

V

THAT bullet passed through Harper's hair.

Before she could fire again, he had caught her wrist and thrown up the weapon,

"You fool, I'm not Sir James!" he exclaimed sharply. "He's just returned now— he's outside! I was trying to escape from this accursed house— "

She wilted abruptly, her distended eyes fastened upon him. She did not even try to retain the pistol he wrested from her.

"Listen, now!" exclaimed Harper quickly. "When they come in, say a man was here, fired at you, leaped out into the garden!

Then grab your chance and get out of here quick, They'll be too busy to care about you, never fear. My name's Harper— newspaper correspondent. You clear out and get the police here, understand? Just walk straight out. They'll have other things to worry about— "

He turned. Against one long wall, flanking a bookcase, was a tattered but priceless old fragment of tapestry, a large chair in front of it. In a flash, Harper perceived that this was his one hope, and a slim one. He darted to it, pulled out the chair a trifle, and slipped behind the folds of the tapestry, as the doar was burst open.

And in this instant he prayed that the woman might have her wits about her.

"What the devil!" exclaimed the voice of the Gray Wolf. "Who are you—?"

"He nearly killed me! He shot at me!" broke out the woman. "I'm Grace Mills— wanted to see you about my sister— that man—"

"What man? Where is he?"

"He jumped out the window, there—"

A sharp, shrill cry echoed up from outside the room; the cry of a woman. Then her voice came in rapid French.

"M'sieu! He is gone— the patient is gone! Your man here is dead—"

Harper had found a rent in the tapestry, close to his eye. Through this he caught sight of the room. Grace Mills, apparently almost in hysterics, was by the table. Inside the door stood the Gray Wolf, a short, fat man at his elbow.

"Quick, Dumond!" exclaimed the Gray Wolf, the first to comprehend what might have taken place. "Upstairs! You, Jacques! To the garden, swiftly! Watch the gate, Chartres—"

His voice, no longer cold, now rang with a steely vibrance. Then he was leaping across to the long open windows." Next instant he was gone.

DUMOND had turned and scuttled away, crying out something to the woman above, who still called shrilly. Harper saw Grace Mills turn, glance around, and then quietly walk out the door.

What of Chartres, guarding the gate? He might be glad to be rid of her; now that they knew Harper was gone, all of them would have but the one thought,

the one desperate intent, She would matter nothing. And yet, at the same time—

"Can't chance it," he thought. "She went to pieces, then bucked up again and took my clue like a good one! I'll have to stick by her, at least make sure she got past Chartres. If she did, I can play a waiting game. She might strike a pair of bicycle officers at the door, or she might have to go clear to Deauville, Came here to kill the Gray Wolf, eh? Probably didn't know him as such, however."

Harper pulled the tattered hanging aside and stepped out.

In his hand he still held the pistol he had wrenched from the woman, but looked at it with disgust. It was a tiny thing, and its smali-caliber bullet would not stop a man. This Mills dame, thought Harper, was certainly an amateur at killing.

Then he jerked up his head sharply, listening. The door into the hall was half closed, Directly outside it was Jacques, calling urgently.

"What's happened up there? Dumond! Therese!"

"He killed Farquarson and got away," came the shrill voice of his wife. "Get into the garden, quickly! The patron is searching there!"

"Who's that woman outside? Chartres let her go out— "

"Never mind, imbecile! Into the garden!"

Harper drew a quick breath of relief. Chartres had let her pass, then!

He looked about the room. No egress except by the windows or the door into the hall. He advanced toward that door, intending to shut it— then it was thrown open almost in his face. The maid Therese burst in, stopped short at sight of him, stared at him in paralyzed shock. Then she turned and fled.

Harper kicked the door shut behind her, with a curse at his own inability to shoot down a woman, Well, they would soon learn that he was here, and armed, After that, what? If they delayed long enough, the whole outfit would be nabbed when the police arrived, if they did arrive. Everything was conjecture.

"If I had a real gun!" muttered Harper, angrily, as he eyed the door and waited.

He heard a slight sound. Something warned him; not in time, though, He remembered the open window, remembered that the Gray Wolf was out there in the garden, He turned around— too late!

From the open window came the heavy crack of an automatic.

The torso of a man showed there against the sunlight, head and shoulders only, the pistol and arm rigid across the window-sill. To the shot, Harper's head jerked sharply. Then he crumpled to the floor and lay face down, inert, motionless. Over his left cheek crept a scarlet trickle.

THE soft, cold laugh of the Gray Wolf rang on the room.

In through the window came Sir James Santerre, and tossed his pistol into a cotner as he came; its need was ended. With rapid strides he passed the sprawled figure of pales and jerked open the door into the hall.

"Out!" rose his shout. "Jacques! Dumond— everybody! Run for it! Take the passage— I'll join you at the beach!"

Excited voices answered him, He slammed the door, turned swiftly to that very tapestry behind which Harper had been sheltered, and ripped it away. Here a switch-box was revealed. He tore this box open, caught the switch inside, and threw it over.

"So!" he exclaimed, and looked down at Harper. "I failed to hit you in the ear, eh? You whirled around and spoiled the shot— but not entirely, eh? Well, stay here, fool that you were! You've spoiled all my plans, You've made me turn to my emergency getaway— if that's any satisfaction to your spirit!"

A bitter oath escaped him, then he reached out, took a cigar from the table, and biting off the end, lit it carefully. All haste had fallen away from him, His cigar alight, he looked about the room, sniffed the air, and frowned slightly. Then, turning to the wide fireplace, he bent over one end of it.

There was a grating sound, and with a subdued thud the entire front of the fireplace moved out and halted. The Gray Wolf looked at the opening thus revealed, and shrugged.

"So many plans, to go for nothing!" he observed aloud. "This Harper, this ass of a newspaper man, to cause everything to fall in ruins! Truly, a fool can create more damage in a moment than a wise man can repair— ah! It has worked!"

HE LEANED forward. Smoke was eddying in under the hall door. From outside the room was now perceptible a roar and crackle of mounting flames. So intent was the Gray Wolf upon this, that he failed to observe the slight movement made by the inert figure on the floor.

Harper had been recalled to life by hearing his own name voiced.

Smoke-fingers were reaching along the floor from beneath the door, curling around him chokingly. He opened his eyes as he lay, and saw the figure of the Gray Wolf standing by the fireplace, peering forward, watching and listening. What had happened, how much time had elapsed, Harper did not know.

Nor did he care. In his hand was still the little pistol. With a sudden effort, a surging upthrust of energy, he lifted himself on one arm, jerked up the pistol, fired. He fired a second time,

Through the smoke-mist he saw the Gray Wolf stagger, heard a frightful cry. Then the figure vanished entirely. There was a heavy thud.

Harper came to one knee, amazedly, lost balance, came down on his hands and knees. But he perceived that the incredible was true. The man was gone from sight— had apparently melted into the solid wall.

Coughing, choking, with a fierce heat and the red glow of flames coming from the door, he dragged himself toward the windows. Twice he fell then rose again and crept on, blinded by the smoke, half suffocated by the fumes. Somehow the Gray Wolf had got away, but he had not gone scatheless. Those two bullets had reached him.

Sudden terror seized Harper. Behind him came a gush of flames as the door went down, a terrific wave of heat, of smoke, of fire. He was nearly at the windows now, three feet from the open air, when that gusty billow of smoke closed in around him. He sank down helpless.

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HOURS later, they told him about it— the *maire* and schoolmaster of the commune, the police officials from Deauville, the little woman with the dark, sad face who sat beside him as he lay.

"You see, your disappearance had already become known," said Grace Mills. "When I told them who you were, it caused instant excitement. Nobody had known until I recognized you— nobody quite believed my story, until that house broke into flames. They barely got you out in time. Your head's hurt, and a bullet came within an ace of killing you

"The Gray Wolf?" exclaimed Harper eagerly. "Tell me— did they get him?"

"They know everything about him now, yes," she answered, "So he was the Gray Wolf! I had never suspected that. I thought he was a titled Englishman merely— well, no matter. You can tell them everything they don't know already."

"Of course— but did they get him?" insisted Harper.

She shook her head, frowning a little.

"Get him? I don't understand, Everybody there had vanished. They're searching the ruins now for bodies; they don't know whether anyone perished in the fire or not."

Half an hour later, Harper was sitting up, telling his story to a police stenographer, when two blackened gendarmes appeared.

"Well?" exclaimed the officer in charge. "Any bodies among the ruins?"

"Impossible to say, my captain," replied one of the two men, "We could find none at least. But the fire was so hot— whew! There was petrol stored in the place, apparently. It blew everything to bits. As you know, it is a distinct contravention of the law to store petrol in such quantities in a dwelling— "

Once more Harper asked his question about the Gray Wolf, but had no answer, except the picture in his own mind; the staggering figure vanishing amid smokewreathes, vanishing apparently into thin air.

But the police had no doubt whatever. The Gray Wolf was dead.

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11: The Mountaineer

Georges Surdez

1900-1949

Adventure 20 Oct 1924

The author is best known for his French Foreign Legion stories; but this takes place in medieval France

THE hills of Franche Comté surged eastward, until lost in the gray haze of the twilight sky. On a far slope, suspended like an eagle's nest, the Castle of Baucy emerged, as if grown from the mountain itself, a monstrous tumor of masonry, grim and cold. Towers and walls held the same rugged, inhuman appearance as the huge boulders left scattered by the receding icecap of aforgotten age. Bertrand de Baucy, the new lord, had come back to his domain but a few weeks before. His father had died four years previously, so that in the long period between 1220 and 1224, the countryside had had no active master.

The shadows gathered in the valleys, but the crests were still a-blaze with the last red rays of the failing sun. A tenuous silver stream glinting far below was the Doubs River. The silence increased the fairylike aspect of the panorama, a silence broken only by the scream of the wind through the fir-pines, and the tinkling of cowbells from the pastures invisible among the trees.

Lahure emerged from the forest trail into an open space. He stood on a boulder and contemplated the countryside, idealized by the approaching darkness. His eyes filled with the beauty of the mountains. Within his heart welled a great, inarticulate love for his home land. He laid down the crossbow he was carrying, and remained silhouetted against the sky.

He gave a first impression of being short and stocky. But this was due to his width of shoulders and long arms. A closer scrutiny of his peculiar, heavily-set figure, would reveal that he stood several inches above ordinary height. His arms and legs were bare, muscular, denoting agility as well as strength. There was grace in his massiveness. A sleeveless leather jacket covered his torso, falling nearly to his knees. His feet were incased in soft skin sandals. He wore no hat.

The face was coarse, almost bestial. Massive nose, powerful jaws and heavy eyebrows combined to create a mask of ferocity. But his eyes, very light blue, were gentle, almost tender. Judged by his body and face, Lahure was a sort of apeman, by his eyes, a child.

The tinkling of cowbells was suddenly dominated by the graver peal of church bells in the valley villages, ringing the Angelus. Lahure bent his head, and did not look up until the last brazen vibration had died out. When he lifted his face, the colors of the sky had shifted, and long bands of red streaked the

horizon to the west. Small, golden-edged clouds moved swiftly before the wind. Lahure sensed the freedom of the mountains. Resentment that had been smouldering all day, grew, and he clenched his fists in sudden anger. He would not till the soil or herd cattle, even if the law and the Church combined against him.

The priest had chided him. And Guerin, the gamekeeper of the castle, had warned him not to hunt in the forests. De Baucy, lord of the district, had summoned him, and taken from him the privilege of hunting, a privilege granted by the ruler's father, Jean de Baucy, to Lahure's father, twelve years before. The mountaineer had grown up to a life of hunting. A privilege lost is worse than a privilege never held. There was also talk of making Lahure go down in the valley to till land. As well expect water to run up hill, as a mountain man to live in the low land.

After his father's withdrawal from the armies of France, due to wounds received in the hard fought day at Bouvines, when Philip-Augustus defeated Otho of Germany, Bertrand de Baucy had stayed with the banners for the rest of the Normandy Campaign. Later, he had gone south, to Toulouse, in the minor Crusade against the followers of the Greek, Nicetas, who were heretics and rebels against the Roman Church.

Having spent most of his life in camps, he had brought back iron-clad ideas that ill-fitted with his people's newly-acquired independence, and, from the first, friction had occurred. To enforce his wishes, however, the new lord had brought from the wars his hard, savage mercenaries, commanded by a petty noble from Guyenne, Lusignac, who bore the title of captain.

Lahure reasoned that it would have been much preferable for Bertrand de Baucy to stay with the new King, Louis VIII, and help this monarch in his expeditions in the Poitou Province. There was the place for a warlike man, not here among poor folks. But soldiers or no soldiers, Lahure decided he would keep on hunting. No imported archers could prevent him from killing a boar when he so wished.

He felt a momentary hesitation. He recalled Jean de Baucy. The old baron had often stopped before the Lahure hut, during hunting trips, and called for food. He had patted Lahure on the head and said: 'When this boy grows up, he will serve my son.' And old man Lahure had grinned with pleasure. But between the father and the son, there could be no comparison. Bertrand was proud, harsh. It seemed as if he must count every head of game in the forests, for the loss of one beast angered him.

"Let them stop me!' Lahure concluded, and picked up his crossbow. "Let them stop me, if they can."

He turned, and went into the forest.

THE next morning, at daylight, Lusignac, right hand mercenary of Lord de Baucy, mounted his horse in the courtyard of the castle. With him went twenty men, including Guerin, the gamekeeper, and Zebe, an archer famed throughout northern France. Each rider wore a light breast-plate and helmet, and was armed with sword and bow. The stated purpose was a boar hunt, but the wearing of armor portended a more serious intent.

Outside the main wall, Lusignac held his horse until Guerin came alongside.

"Where does this Lahure live?" he asked.

"In a hut, up the far mountain." Guerin indicated. "Is he the man we are after?'

"Yes. I feared to say this earlier, lest he be warned. He was hunting again last night?"

"Yes, captain."

"De Baucy is angered with him, but nevertheless does not wish him harm. From all I hear, he is an independent fellow. He has been warned several times, has he not?"

"By myself, and then by the baron," Guerin explained. 'And one other warning will not stop him. I think that he should be allowed to go in peace. He kills only what is necessary for himself."

"As for me, I'll warn the man, and if he does not promise to behave, I'll handle him." He smiled and extended his hands. He was a large man, with a reputation for great physical strength. "I'll chastise him with these!"

"If you do so, captain, I'll stand by with a sword."

Lustignac's face darkened at the implied doubt.

"Don't interfere, whatever happens," he commanded.

Guerin did not insist further in his warning.

For several hours, the party trotted on the forest paths. From the dark pockets beneath the branches came the strong smell of fallen needles, a bracing, invigorating odor. Never had Lusignac seen such a country, and he had traveled far: Throughout France, in Palestine, in Spain and in he Germanic lands. The poetic instinct, strong in his southern blood, was awakened, and he sang softly.

At a cross trail, they came upon a wild sow with her young. She backed into the bushes, turned her snout defiantly toward them as the little ones ran into the undergrowth. Lusignac halted the ready arrows with a gesture, laughed and touched his steel cap.

"Peace, mother of swine," he saluted.

The sow disappeared, and Lusignac rode on. He was glad to be here, instead of searching for glory in the Holy Land, baked by the sun within his steel armor, as a lobster within its shell. "He felt that he had taken the right course to follow de Baucy to his home.

At the edge of a clearing, he discerned a small stone hut, the walls moss grown, and almost buried in foliage.. The door was opened, and smoke rose from the chimney.

"Who lives here?' he asked Guerin.

"Lahure."

Lusignac's arrogance returned. He forgot his carefree mood of a moment before. He dismounted and strode toward the hut. Guerin, following him, loosened the hilt of his sword in the scabbard. The slight noise annoyed Lusignac.

"Don't interfere," he repeated.

"No, sir."

Lusignac pounded on the door panel.

"Hello in there!" he called out.

A sound of footsteps within, and Lahure appeared.

"Greetings," he offered.

"Thou wilt leave this place before sundown," Lusignac said, without returning the salutation.

"Who orders?" Lahure demanded, evenly.

"I, Lusignac, for my lord de Baucy."

Lahure took in the strong party at a glance.

"It is well," he accepted.

Lusignac scorned to question him. He was surprized at this immediate surrender, and rather disappointed. He would have liked to prove to Guerin, low born as he was, that Lusignac was not afraid to match strength with the poacher, giant though he was. He saw only the acceptance of his orders. He did not know that Lahure, bowing before superior force, intended to leave the hut at sundown, as he had agreed, but only to seek another home in the mountains. And so, he sought for a way to engage a quarrel.

He pushed Lahure roughly aside, and strode within.

The hut was simply furnished, a single stool before the huge table which occupied the center of the beaten earth floor, a pile of boughs in the corner used asa couch. A fire-place was built within the wall itself, and on the fire, a cast-iron pot steamed and bubbled.

Lusignac wrinkled his nostrils,

"Hum— what hast thou there?" he asked.

"Stew, sir," Lahure answered. "And at your service if you desire."

"Made with stolen game, I suppose," Lusignac remarked.

Lahure did not answer, but brought the great iron pot to the table, and picked up a wooden spoon.

"For the meat, you may use your dagger," he suggested.

The crossbow, hanging on the wall, attracted the captain's attention. He took it down, worked the windlass and sprung the trigger.

"A large weapon," he said. "I'll take it."

Lahure paled, but said nothing.

Lusignac replaced the crossbow on its hook, approached the table, looked into the pot, sniffed.

"Smells flat."

"I have no spices, only salt,' Lahure explained.

"And thou dost eat all thy food unseasoned, thus?"

"Yes, sire."

"That's too bad. But I'll season this for thee."

He bent near the pot, and spat into it.

"There," he concluded. "A serf's stew seasoned byanoble. Eat."

Lahure's eyes grew dark.

"No," he said calmly.

"When Lusignac turns cook, he does not want- his dish spurned," Lusignac said, smilingly facing the mountaineer.

His lips straightened instantly, as he saw Lahure's eyes turn from deep blue to almost black, with tiny red lights behind. Guerin moved nearer. The sun, coming in at the only window, glistened on the gamekeeper's cuirass. Seconds went by.

Then Lahure made a sudden move. Lusignac, surprized by the other's speed, felt himself grasped by the leather belt that fastened his breast-plate at the waist, and by the loose folds of his jacket. He struggled with all his strength. He tried in vain to keep his feet.

"You have seasoned it, now taste of it," Lahure panted, and plunged the soldier's head into the pot.

The pot overturned, the table followed. And Lusignac, prone on the floor, clutched at his face, half-mad with pain. He heard a brief struggle as Guerin collided with Lahure, and shouts, as the soldiers outside ran up. He found out that his eyes were uninjured, as he had instinctively closed them. On the floor, Guerin sprawled, unconscious.

As for Lahure, he was not to be seen. The window was open. The crossbow was gone.

ONE of the men found flour, made a paste, which was spread over Lusignac's scalded hands and face. Guerin, who had been struck over the head, recovered consciousness. Beneath the window were found the tracks of Lahure's cord soles, imprinted in the moist soil.

And the party set out in pursuit.

The tracks, though not easily followed, at last led them to the shoulder of the mountain. On the opposite slope, the grass was thin and yellow, showing the bare earth as the mangy hair of a dog shows the naked hide beneath. A tall fir-pine that stood in the center of this open space, sent a long shadow pointing toward the east.

Guerin halted, and motioned for the rest to do likewise.

"He can be nowhere but behind that tree. He cannot escape. Beyond is a thirtyfoot leap across a crevasse, called the Wolf's Leap. Wait until he shows himself, and Zebe can get him with a shaft."

"Good," Lusignac agreed.

He scattered his men in the undergrowth, and was glad to see them eager. Lahure had defied them many times, since their arrival, when still protected by his privilege.

The mountaineer appeared suddenly, his broad shoulders and long arms as unmistakable as the shape of the crossbow in his hands.

"Now— Zebe!" Lusignac shouted.

Zebe released his arrow, the string sang. Lahure fell flat on the ground, and the shaft passed him, high. Then he stood up. The crossbow vibrated, and Zebe cried out. The quarrel had broken his arm above the elbow. And all knew that Lahure had deliberately spared the archer's life. The missile could have been more easily directed at the unprotected breast above the pointed cuirass.

Zebe, almost weeping with pain, handed his bow to Lusignac.

"I'll not use it for some months," he said.

The captain turned to the others:

"What are you waiting for? Shoot!"

But Lahure was running toward the brink of the cliff, toward the Wolf's Leap. As he came to the edge, he held his arms high, gathered his legs beneath him, then leaped. His body appeared to hang still in the air. He fell, disappeared.

Lusignac and his men rushed forward.

Below gaped an abyss, hundreds of feet deep. Across, a full thirty feet, slightly lower than the ground upon which the castle men stood, was the rim of the opposite slope. It was as if the mountain had been cleft in two with a giant's sword. And, on the farther side, stood Lahure, who had done the impossible, had covered the distance in one tremendous leap.

Lusignac, recovering from his first surprize, slapped the nearest archer on the shoulder.

"Go ahead— feather him!"

But the man, a Breton, dropped his bow, knelt.

"What's the matter with thee?" Lusignac demanded, angrily.

"It is a miracle, captain. He is protected of the Saints. I cannot—"

Lusignac turned and looked at his men. He saw that they were all as impressed as the archer. He knew them too well to insist that they shoot. To them, the leap had been miraculous. As for himself, he abandoned the thought of picking up the bow. He knew that he would be no match for the other in an exchange of arrows. The mountaineer waited, scorning to flee, confident that he could beat any man to the shot.

Lusignac raged, but words were all he could command.

"Surrender now, and I will give thee naught but a lashing. Wait until thou art caught, and I'll hang thee by the heels, with a fire to keep thee warm."

Lahure laughed loudly:

"There are men in the mountains to help me, who would not taste the seasoning you offer. Go, before I finish what I started." Lusignac looked shamefacedly at his men.

"Peace for today," he agreed. "We'll meet again."

LUSIGNAC found de Baucy before the huge fireplace in the castle hall.

The baron was conversing with a clerk, who held voluminous rolls of parchment. The immense room, with the stained glass windows tracing multicolored patterns on the board floor, seemed interminable to the 'captain, under the curious glances of the servants. The menials bit their lips, and stared with pretended interest at the heavy rafters crossing above, or into the flickering flames. Lusignac knew he cut a ridiculous figure, with his face plastered with hardened flour paste. And when the episode became known, the laughter would increase. An armed soldier, not long returned from wars, disfigured by a poacher's stew!

"Well, Lusignac!" de Baucy shouted. "Fixed like a fish for the broiling, eh?"

Lusignac laughed with simulated ease.

"Nearer the truth than you think, my lord, but in this instance, I was cooked first, and dressed after."

"I'll hear about it at meal time, my friend,' de Baucy went on. 'But I have something important to tell thee." He took one of the rolls from the clerk's hands. "Miron has gathered these documents for me. They were left after my father's death. I don't understand such things myself, but I am told that this grants the Lahure family the privilege of the hunt for all time. So that— "

"Forgive me, my lord," Lusignac interrupted swiftly. "But you ordered me to bring him to terms and revoke his privilege."

"True enough. But I did not then know that the privilege was not revokable. For nothing on earth would I go against my father's wish."

"I have this very day informed Lahure that he should leave the mountains, that it was your wish."

De Baucy shrugged.

"Then, thou may'st send a man to inform him that it is my pleasure that he should stay, and hunt as he desires. Nothing that has been done with words but can be undone with more words. Tis not like a sword blow, which, once given, cannot be taken back."

Bertrand de Lusignac grinned sheepishly.

"He refused flatly to obey your orders in any case," he said.

"Refused?" the baron's face darkened, then he broke into a smile. "That's my mountain people for thee, Lusignac! They will not take injustice, even from the mighty!"

"Then, you forgive him?" Lusignac said, standing up.

"Yes. Should I quarrel with a man like Lahure? He is a child!"

"Then, my lord, I renounce your service, and will go back to Guyenne immediately."

De Bauty held up his hands in protest.

"Why?"

Lusignac narrated the incident in the hut. From his relation it appeared that Lahure had been insolent from the first, that the conflict had developed through the poacher's own fault.

De Baucy, who had known Lusignac many years, as a true friend and a brave soldier, became indignant.

"And he burned thy face, eh?" He threw down the parchment he held in his hand, stamped upon it. "Then, though he shall keep his right of hunt, he'll pay for something else!" He came close to Lusignac, laid a hand on the captain's shoulder. "Thou shalt see, de Lusignac, that thy quarrel is mine. From what I hear, this Lahure is popular among the peasants, and anything done against him will cause resentment. But his impudence has carried him too far. How didst thou and thy men permit his escape?"

Lusignac told of the pursuit that ended at the Wolf's Leap. De Baucy, who recalled the chasm from his childhood trips in the mountains, shook his head unbelievingly.

"A man cannot do it," he asserted. "He must know a trail, a short cut, and thus have deceived all."

"I saw him, with these eyes, leaping."

De Baucy moved about thoughtfully.

"If it were any one but thee whom he had harmed and insulted, I would let him go. He deserves pardon after a feat like that."

"He has stronger, more supple sinews than other men, that is all," Lustignac pointed out. "There was no miracle. As for me, whether by your orders, or privately, I will have no peace until I burn his face in return, with interest. Think you it is pleasant to feel burning stew on one's cheeks?"

De Baucy frowned.

"Listen, Lusignac; I myself will capture Lahure. Then thou mayst hang him, or cut his throat. But as for torturing him, and going thyself to claim him, it is out of the question. Thou art a stranger. Things will be accepted from me which would bring the peasants down about your ears."

"I fear not— " Lusignac remarked.

"Since my father's death, and while I was away, the people have tasted freedom, and it is too early to arouse them."

"Bah, they are cattle— "

"But sometimes fight. Hast thou never heard of Gaudry, Bishop of Laon? The mob caught him in his own castle, after he had abused his power, and his brain was spilled with an ax blow."

"A churchman—"

"A soldier as well. And that was near a hundred years gone, when times were better for our nobles. It is wise to be careful."

"Very well," agreed Lusignac,

De Baucy turned to Miron, the clerk, who had waited just out of hearing during the conversation.

"Go, and tell the priest down in the village to proclaim that Lahure is an outcast, and that a reward will be paid for him at the castle."

Miron shuffled uneasily.

"Why dost thou wait?" de Baucy demanded sharply.

"No one will see with favor Lahure punished for hurt done upon a soldier not of this country," Miron said, boldly enough. "Your father, my lord, was just."

De Baucy was not over patient. He who, a few seconds before, had recommended leniency, forgot his words. His brown hand slashed out, and the elderly man tumbled back.

"If there be talk against me, it will not be within my hearing," he said coldly. ''Go." Then he turned to Lusignac. "Talkative old man. Too privileged in my father's time. I may talk leniency, I may pardon, but I will not have it demanded."

"Good speech!" Lusignac approved enthusiastically. "I thought my lord had changed when he spoke of fear of the peasants."

"The time has not yet come to fear them," the baron concluded, unaware of his prophecy.

"Nor ever will come," Lusignac added. And they sat down to eat.

DE BAUCY had been trained in a school that did not allow of delay.

The next morning, he gathered sixty men at arms and set out after Lahure. Lusignac, who had been vain of his good looks, was chiefly concerned with his face. He had summoned a famous leech from a nearby town, who was reputed to heal by touch. In his lord's absence, he was to command at the castle.

This time, there was no pretense at a peaceful errand. The men were armed as for war, with lances, swords, bows, and heavier armor than worn the previous day. De Baucy was clad im a scintillating suit of steel and, behind him, a squire carried his battle helmet, dented in places by blows of simitars received in the East. The azure pennon of the de Baucy fluttered at the end of a staff.

The men, both those who had formed the garrison of the castle and those who had come back with the baron from the Norman wars, were jubilant. The life of the castle was dull, an uneventful routine. Here was an occasion to go man hunting, with very little danger, they figured, a business preferable to fighting the Emperor Otho's trained infantry, or the Saracens, who were even mightier fighters.

Guerin alone was uneasy. He realized how difficult it would be to corner Lahure in his own mountains.

The party entered the single street of the first village, and halted before the church, where de Baucy questioned the old priest concerning the state of affairs, the prospects of the crop, and cleverly sought information as to Lahure's whereabouts. As he leaned over in conversation, Miron, the clerk, appeared at the door of the church, then descended the steps. The elderly scribe was pale, but resolute.

He grasped de Baucy's bridle, and pulled the horse around, pointing to the trail leading back to the castle.

"Strike me again, my lord, if it pleases you," he said. 'But take warning and go back."

"Warning?"

"The young men have joined Lahure, and will resist."

"Resist me? Let them try," de Baucy said, grimly. "They will see that fighting the game-guards and resisting their lord are different pastimes. Let go." But Miron was stubborn, and protested again.

With a smile, the baron threw him aside, and urged his horse through the crowd of older peasants who were standing some distance away.

"Come, men!"' he called to the troop. On the highway once more, he summoned Guerin to his side. "Where is the *Val d'Enfer*?" (Hell's Valley) he asked.

"In the eastern mountain, my lord."

"Can one arrive there with horses?"

"No."

"Then we will dismount when needed, and attack on foot. The priest said that was where Lahure and his followers gather."

The villages along the road reported the same location. The calmer men, those who were devoted to peace, said that their more truculent fellow citizens had joined the mountaineer, and were disposed to match blow with blow.

"It might be wiser to go back and get more men," Guerin suggested. "Lahure has near two hundred men, all young and strong, who can wield scythes and sticks, and may have crossbows."

"Keep thy peace, Guerin. Were I alone, I would not turn back. I must either crush the fools now, or forever consult them in what I do."

Guerin cast an uneasy glance behind him.

"These men are not from the mountains,' Guerin explained. 'And their worth is uncertain should bad weather come, as seems likely."

He indicated the sky. Black clouds were gathered together in an immense tumulus, and it was noticeably darker than it had been a few moments before. There was every appearance of a coming thunderstorm.

"It will be night before we reach the Val d'Enfer," Guerin insisted, "and the storm will hinder us."

"That is the manner Lahure will reason," de Baucy said. "And, for that belief, he will not guard himself carefully. We will go down in the rain and darkness and surprize him."

"Yes, my lord," Guerin agreed, diplomatically.

De Baucy, more annoyed than he would admit by the turn of events, chatted to Guerin as he would have done to a more worthy listener, explaining his reasons for striking an immediate blow. The Val d'Enfer could be entered by but one trail. It was a sort of gigantic well, pitted in the flank of the mountain, the bottom covered with fir-pines. The sides were impossible to scale, except in one place, a narrow pathway descending steeply between the boulders of the southern slope. The poacher and his partisans, with crossbows, could hold the position against any number of men in the daytime.

To starve them out, as Guerin suggested, would take too long, and would create the rumor that he, Bertrand de Baucy, belted knight and one time Crusader, had feared to attack his rebellious people, trusting to hunger rather than to strength of arms. The storm, instead of mitigating against the force from the castle, was on the contrary a help from Heaven, allowing the possibility of a night attack.

Guerin nodded disconsolately. Who was he to offer suggestions to this knight, who had held high command in the Holy Land, who had fought on many stricken fields? In all likelihood, the plan would succeed. But the mountains at night, and in a storm—

"LEAVE the horses here," Guerin said.

It appeared that Fate was on the side of de Baucy. The threatening storm held off. Guerin had captured a watcher set by Lahure. The man, frightened out of his wits by the presence of his master, babbled all he knew. He and another

had been the only sentries posted outside the valley. The other sentry was on guard at the entrance to the trail.

His obedience and willingness to give information did not serve him. De Baucy, born and bred to the belief that his race was supreme and should brook no resistance from lower people, angered beyond control by the rebellion, and, most of all, afraid to appear as worried as he felt, ordered the sentry's death. The man was hanged from a tree-limb, and, as they proceeded, the party could see the dark shape silhouetted grotesquely against the sky. The deed once done, de Baucy regretted his hasty action, but no one could put the breath of life back into the strangled body.

At Guerin's announcement, he dismounted.

"Five men to guard the horses," he said, and, with skilled eyes he picked out the men who felt frightened or ill, to be left behind.

Then, he stripped off his heavy armor, armlets, thigh pieces and corselet, donned an archer's light steel cap, exchanged his long, broad sword for a shorter weapon, easier to wield.

"Go thou ahead, Guerin, and pluck me that sentry from his place,'' he ordered.

Guerin hesitated.

"Is he also to be killed?"

De Baucy saw that to grant one man's life after taking that of another, would be an admission of wrong done in the first place.

"Yes," he said.

Some one spoke in the ranks, unwittingly loud.

"An ill omen, that swinging corpse was. And now, another."

The knight whirled quickly, scanned the faces. But the man who had spoken succeeded in concealing his dismay, and could not be picked out. Moreover, this was neither the time nor the place to antagonize his men.

"Let the man who talked act well," he contented himself with saying.

Guerin went ahead, on his errand, and the rest followed at a considerable distance. Night fell completely. The thick clouds blanketed the stars, and the darkness was absolute. But Guerin evidently had no trouble finding his way.

De Baucy felt a hand on his arm; a faint glint of steel. He heard the gamekeeper's voice:

"The trail is free, my lord."

"Good. Thou'lt be rewarded, lead on."

Followed a march over stony soil. The brink of the Val d'Enfer was reached. The knight was for starting down immediately, but Guerin declared that it was best to await the breaking of the storm. Thus, any dislodged stone would not be noticed below, the pattering rain would cover the noise of the descent.

"Well put," de Baucy acknowledged. "We will wait."

About ten o'clock the first peal of thunder resounded. The storm broke, furiously. The rain, driven before the wind, swept down horizontally, and brushed against the ground with the sound of a cataract. The thunder resounded, as if a cyclopic iron drum was being beaten in the immense, echoing vault of the sky.

Bertrand de Baucy felt the water trickle from the polished helmet to his neck, and seep down within his jacket between his shoulder blades. Although it was summer, the drops were ice cold. He shuddered, then smiled. Who would expect an attack in weather such as this? He shouted to Guerin, and his voice, muffled by the downpour, was scarcely audible to himself.

The party might make as much noise as they chose, the rebels down in the valley would not hear. Boulders, detached from the slope by the force of the rain were heard as a faint rumble. A flash of lightning revealed for a fraction of a second the steel breast-plates of his men, and their dripping faces. No fear there, Bertrand noticed. Resolution, unemotional resolution.

"Thou shalt lead," he informed the gamekeeper, when the later was close to his side.

"My lord, the way is insecure. True, the rain will conceal us, but it will also make the descent dangerous, slippery. It would be wise to wait."

"Thou art afraid to lead. I will go ahead," de Baucy replied. "Follow within hailing distance of me, and have the men so disposed that, at all times, they will be within speaking distance of the one ahead and the one following. Come."

He stepped over the edge of the trail, which fell beneath the level of the ground like a step. And, immediately, although his eyes could discern nothing, he had the impression of the pit sinking below him.

"Stay—" he began.

"My lord will turn back?" Guerin asked, hopefully.

Now that Guerin had guessed his intention, de Baucy's brave and stubborn nature would not permit him to retreat.

"No. Tell the men that he who wishes, may drop out. A frightened man could compromise everything."

The word was passed along the line, that whoever desired could remain behind without fear of punishment. The answer traveled back to the leader; unanimous support. The soldiers, too, had their standards and pride. De Baucy took the second step, the third. He was cautious, not risking his weight until he had carefully tested the foothold. His hands clutched at the wet, smooth surface of the rocks, and his muscles were tensed. Occasionally he reached up to touch Guerin on the leg, to make sure that he was there. He felt that he might turn craven were he suddenly to find himself alone.

A rattle, a faint cry, and he stopped short, listening, his heart beating rapidly.

"What is it?" he called out.

Guerin's voice came from above, fragments of words.

"ard— fallen— be careful!"

Buchard, no doubt, a man who had been with de Baucy ever since he wore spurs! What an inglorious death for a soldier! But he had passed out of life doing his duty, and the end was identical, whether one lost existence quelling rebellious peasants or combating warriors. What if he, de Baucy should fall and die? Was it not stupid to risk one of the best lances in France on such a puerile chase?

"The wine is poured. It must be drunk," he quoted.

And went on.

At times, when the lightning forked across the night, he glanced upward, and saw his followers strung out on the flank of the descent. He wondered if the peasants could see also. Then he reasoned that the distance was too great, the rain too confusing. And should they see, uncertain crossbow shooting would avail them little.

He slipped. He had a sensation of falling. He slid on his stomach for some yards. Then, his hand caught a root. Shivering with emotion, he waited for Guerin.

The gamekeeper brought his lips close to his master's ear.

"Two others have fallen," he said.

The trail criss-crossed widely on the flank of the mountain, which was fortunate, as otherwise, a falling man would have dragged others with him.

"How far down are we?" de Baucy asked.

"But a short way, my lord, perhaps one-fourth of the distance."

"So little?"

"Yes. I estimated by that large bush we just passed."

De Baucy had believed himself close to the floor of the valley. He became aware that his endurance would indeed be tested before the end of the journey. Again, he had a foreboding that he had best retrace his steps. He was now completely drenched, and it was certain that he would be ill from the effect. A recurrent fever, first contracted during an epidemic in camp, was very easily brought back. But he set his teeth, and proceeded. His savage nature was further aroused against Lahure and his followers.

"My lord— "

"What is it, now?"

"One of the men has lost his nerve, and dares not move from his secure footing. He holds up the line."

De Baucy swore.

"Let the rest pass over him," he ordered.

"They cannot. They tried."

"Can I pass thee and the others between here and he?"

"Yes. The trail is wide enough."

"Hold tight, then. I'm going back."

Grasping Guerin's arms, he squeezed his body by, and into the comparatively freeway beyond. He was compelled to repeat this maneuver again and again, for he knew he must reach the laggard, or nothing would be done. At last, he was at the man's side.

"Come! Thou seest where I am. 'Tis but a long step."

The other recognized the voice.

"My lord, I cannot see! I dare not move."

A terrific flash and an ear-splitting detonation. De Baucy saw horror on the man's face. He had doubtless looked down. All was dark once more.

"Come!" de Baucy said, grasping the man by the arm.

The frightened soldier pulled his hand free, and nearly pitched the leader into the abyss. Ruthlessly, de Baucy took the only course left him. He reached up, grasped the fellow's shoulder, and hurled him down.

"The road is clear!" he announced. "Follow."

Helped by the lightning, he made his way back to the lead.

The descent was resumed.

He was suddenly dazed by a vivid flash, and he fell back against the rocks, stunned. It was some moments before he recovered and was able to go on. Other peals succeeded one another, near by, it seemed.

"Strange," muttered de Baucy. "They seem quite near, yet I saw no lightning. These mountains are peculiar."

But he kept on, cautiously feeling his way, step by step.

AT SUNRISE, the next morning, the peasant's camp stirred to life.

The rain had ceased before dawn, and the sudden stillness after the gale was bewildering. It seemed that nature had but paused to rest, and at any moment the storm would resume.

Lahure gathered his followers, and after the usual morning prayer, addressed them.

"Comrades, I am grateful to my friends who have come to help me. But it is wrong for one man to cause many deaths. Those of you who are unmarried and have no relatives are welcome. But others must go back. There is yet time."

After an irresolute silence, one of the peasants spoke up.

"Sooner or later, we must come to blows with the castle guards. Why not now?"

"Encounter with the soldiers can end in but one way," Lahure declared, frankly. "That is, our defeat. Even if we beat de Baucy's men, others will come, led by their lords, for in fighting us, the nobles would fight their own battle. The time is not ripe for the poor man to face the rich with weapons in his hands. It

may never come. Those of you who have others depending upon them, should feel no shame, but pride, in withdrawing from a venture that has no possibility of success. To give up the right of fighting for a just cause is sometimes harder than the battle itself. As for me, I have no thought of avoiding my fate. Sooner or later, I will be caught— hanged. But before that time, I shall live a free man. I repeat, unattached men only may stay with me."

"He's right,"' came the agreement.

"We will accompany those who go back to the trail," Lahure went on, "and bid them farewell."

The mountaineers stood bareheaded, and sang together. Deprived of other means of expression, their sentiments were voiced in crudely composed songs, to the tune of church hymns. Then the group set out for the foot of the trail, where the final leave-taking would occur. When they came out of the fir-pines into an open space, a shout went up—

"The soldiers!"

Before them, along the first ridge, were lined fifty armed men, breast-plated, steel-helmeted, bearing on their chests the black *Chimera* of de Baucy. And conspicuous, his back to a tree, stood Lord Bertrand, short sword in hand.

"Surrender!" he challenged.

Lahure took in the situation at a glance. Fifty organized men against two hundred peasants— the odds were too great.

"I will surrender, my lord,' he said. "Provided the others go free. They have done no harm as yet."

"All will lay down their arms and be tied together. And all shall be punished," de Baucy insisted, although it was evident that the gamekeeper, Guerin, who was at his side, advised leniency.

Lahure wondered at this. Then, as he looked closer at the enemy, the reasons became evident. The mercenaries were haggard, unnerved. Their bows were useless, or practically so, the strings wetted by the rain. Lahure's own men had kept their crossbows covered during the night. He whispered the information, and the peasants took heart. The weapons were wound up, bolts slipped into place.

"Withdraw, my lord," Lahure said, "for no one will surrender."

De Baucy raised his sword.

"Forward!" he ordered.

The soldiers hesitated, then advanced slowly. Immediately, missiles came from the crossbows.

At the short distance, the powerful short arrows tore through the thin steel of the breast-plates. Guerin, struck in the forehead, went down. Others fell. And the soldiers turned— and ran. They gained the trail, and hurried up, followed by the bolts of their opponents.

Lahure lifted his hand.

"They flee!"' he cried.

"Who flees?" screamed de Baucy. "Who flees?"

"He must be mad," Lahure thought, but replied aloud: "Your soldiers, my lord."

"Come on, peasants, kill me!" de Baucy shouted, swinging his blade around his head.

The peasants hesitated, then approached him cautiously, some taking aim with the crossbows. Lahure looked keenly at the knight, then motioned for his followers to halt. He circled silently around. De Baucy still stared straight ahead.

The lord was blind!

LAHURE crept closer, then suddenly lunged forward, grasped the sword, and tore it from de Baucy's hand. Bertrand, his face twisted with shame and rage, shouted hoarsely for them to finish him. There were but three among the peasants who were ready to take him at his word. But Lahure halted them.

"Peace!" he urged. "My lord is blind!" And still grasping the sword, he covered de Baucy with his own great frame. "God has taken his sight, and he is sacred."

De Baucy's defiance suddenly left him. He sank down, his face in his gauntleted hands, and sobbed. Those watching him marveled at the spectacle; a noble, weeping before lowly people.

"The lightning, Lahure— the lightning," he said.

Lahure bent, and took de Baucy's hand in his own strong fingers. The sense of loyalty, inborn in him through generations, was awakened. "Sometimes, men so blinded regain their sight. Be of good cheer, my lord. You must return to the castle."

"I hold myself captive, rescue or no rescue. Thou canst claim ransom."

"Get back thy privilege, Lahure, and our rights. No taxes for a year!' shouted the peasants.

Lahure hesitated, but for a moment. He acknowledged to the blind man what he would have refused the warrior— alleglance.

"De Baucy is our Lord, and is ill. He shall go back as he wills, without conditions." And to still further protests, he added, "I say this, Lahure, whose father served his father."

But he had reckoned without the anger of the population, an anger accumulated against de Baucy since his return from the wars.

"Let him go, Lahure, let him go! But before he gets back with his blind eyes, one of us will shaft him with a crossbow."

"No harm shall be done to him!"

This was greeted with a laugh. Lahure, defiant, faced them all.

"I'll go with him, and no hurt shall be done," he said.

AT THE first village, Lahure demanded and obtained a wagon.

De Baucy was now in a high fever, both from his old sickness and the shock. Throughout the long journey, Lahure kept a careful watch, his crossbow ready. The news that Lord de Baucy was blinded, ill, traveling without guards, had spread around the region with surprizing rapidity. But the peasant's resolute bearing protected the knight. On the way, they passed the bodies of two soldiers, which plainly showed that the inhabitants were up in arms against the mercenaries imported by de Baucy.

At length he reached the moat before the outer walls. The bridge was raised. News of the disaster to the expedition had evidently traveled back with the fugitives. There was prolonged parley, and it was not until Lusignac himself came out, that the stout planking rattled into place, and the wagon was allowed to enter the courtyard. The heavy door slammed shut.

Lusignac, his hands on his hips, stood before Lahure, laughing.

"Straight into my hands, poacher!" he exclaimed.

Lahure shrugged.

"I came on a peaceful errand, and I will be allowed to depart. Lord de Baucy is here, sick and blinded."

Lusignac gave a start of surprize, made sure of Lahure's statement, ordered the sick man carried to bed, and the leech to be sent to his bedside.

"Now, I'll go," Lahure said.

Lusignac laughed again: "Mistaken, thou art. Thou shalt stay."

"Is this the reward for saving my lord?"

Lusignac opened his belt pocket, brought out a bag, which he threw to Lahure, who mechanically caught it.

"There's gold to pay thee for the service thou hast done. My Lord de Baucy pays for services, but accepts no favors from thy breed."

"But, if I am to stay, what payment is the gold?"

"To purchase a perpetual mass for the rest of thy soul," Lusignac said. 'In the meanwhile, thy crossbow!"

Lahure bowled over the first man who reached for the weapon. But no man may cope with twenty, and he was overwhelmed, thrown to the ground, half stunned by the blows rained upon him while his arms were held.

Miron, who had returned to the castle, protested, even joined in the struggle in an attempt to help the mountaineer. Lusignac threw him aside roughly. When Lahure was securely bound, Lusignac came near and playfully tugged his hair.

"We meet again," he said. The captain's face was still swathed in bandages. "My master may forgive thy rebellion, but I have a right to avenge the insult given me. No one will deny me that."

"It is indeed worthy of *thee*, captain, to have me hanged. For, did it come to fair blows, *thou* wouldst certainly get the worst of it, belted knight, and cross-wearer though *thou* art."

Thou was applied to inferiors or equals. De Baucy addressed Lusignac as *thou*, but he was the only one permitted to do so. Lusignac flushed at the intended insult. Then he became good-humored again. His face split into a distorted grin.

"By heaven!" he exclaimed. "I have an idea. Thou speakest as an equal. Instead of hanging thee, I will fight thee. Shouldst thou best me, thou art free."

The soldiers approved noisily.

"Hail, captain, make him eat dust!"

"But— " Lusignac added— "thou't fight me with knightly weapons, lance against lance, steel against steel. When one raises oneself to another's rank, he must be willing to take the consequences!"

"A crossbow is my weapon," Lahure said.

"Will I use a bow? No. Sword and lance it is to be."

"He may claim a champion to defend him, if this be a judiciary duel," said the clerk, Miron, who knew the rules of chivalry.

"True," Lusignac agreed. "But who will take his side? He has no noble friends."

"Were de Baucy well, thou wouldst not dare what will be done," Lahure said.

"Perhaps not," Lusignac agreed. "But he is not well, and I am master here. And I will not stay on long after I have settled with thee. A blind man's service holds little glory. When de Baucy recovers, Lusignac will be gone."

"Demand twenty-four hours to secure a champion," urged Miron.

"The demand is granted before the asking," Lusignac said. "Tomorrow, at noon time, gather here and see the poacher fight with his better. Let the matter be heralded over the district this day, so that any one who wants to fight this serf's battle may do so. And now, Lahure, to jail with thee until it is time to mount thy horse."

The soldiers Jaughed loudly, and Lahure was led to the jail.

AT NOON on the next day, the entire population of the castle, save de Baucy, who was still delirious, gathered in the courtyard. The soldiers were anxious to see Lahure get his punishment, for he was the leader of the men who had slain some thirty of their comrades during the retreat from Val d'Enfer. A page, who had seen Lahure make his choice of armor, reported the amusing episode.

Among the new armors, not one had been large enough to fit Lahure's chest, and he had been compelled to chose an old suit of mail and a pot helmet. His manner of handling edged weapons was ludicrous. Lusignac had a reputation for horsemanship, and skill with the lance. Lahure, it was known, was not even a horseman. The conflict could end in but one way.

When Lahure appeared, clad in the rusty mail, an ironical ovation greeted him. The soldiers jokingly made bets on him.

Lusignac, clad in a shining suit, with a crested helmet, followed him. Then the two separated, each going to his own mount. Lusignac made the saddle with ease, in spite of the weight of his plates. Lahure had to be helped up by three or four men.

It was realized that Lusignac did not wish to push the pleasantry too far, beyond the bounds of decency. There were to be no heralding of titles, and the encounter would start upon a given signal.

Lahure was briefly instructed how to rest his lance, how to present his shield, by one of the self-appointed squires. Then the word was given.

Unsteady in the saddle, handling his long weapon awkwardly, Lahure ambled his horse forward. Lusignac sped like a thunder-bolt. Lahure's lance thrust wide. Lusignac's point struck the shield squarely. Lahure was lifted off his horse by the shock, sent into the air.

The crowd laughed.

The hunter turned over as he fell, landed on his shield, lay where he fell, face down, in a cloud of dust. Lusignac dismounted and ran forward, unsheathing his sword. But the prostrate man did not stir. Two men, summoned hurriedly, cut the laces of the helmet, and lifted him to a sitting position. His head fell back, and his blood-covered face was revealed. A rapid examination showed that he was merely stunned, his nose bruised.

Lusignac, who apparently realized the unworthiness of the comedy, turned away with a brief word—

"Hang him."

There were those in the crowd who had been won by Lahure's fearlessness, his scorn of ridicule.

"Shame!" some one shouted, and others took up the cry.

It is doubtful what Lusignac would have decided. Before he could speak, the drawbridge creaked, lowered, and Miron appeared. Behind him, on a great white horse, rode a man in armor.

The newcomer was stalwart. On his helmet glinted a gold coronet. But his shield was of polished steel, bare of any distinguishing emblem. He said nothing, but took his place at the spot where Lahure had stood before the brief engagement. His visor was lowered, his face hidden, but he evidenced absolute calm.

Miron, who had taken upon himself the duty of herald, shouted—

"A champion! A champion!"

Lusignac, who had raised his visor, was seen to smile. Surely, after the encounter of a moment before, he was happy to have the opportunity to show that he could fight in earnest, as well as in jest. He did not ask for the stranger's name, obviously heedless. The soldiers knew that out of every twenty' men Lusignac had met, he had defeated nineteen, and looked for a quick victory by the captain.

Lusignac mounted again, lowered his visor.

"Ready," he said.

The crowd pressed closer. This was an unexpected treat. The identitye of the champion was in question. Who, in the region, would take up a peasant's cause? Could this be but another masquerade?

The signal, a clattering of hoofs, the sharp sound of splintering lances, and both riders were still in the saddle. One course, without result. Attendants came rushing up with new weapons, but Lusignac waved them aside, and upon the stranger's gestured agreement, side-arms were resorted to.

Lusignac drew his long sword, hung his shield to the pommel of his saddle. The other unhooked from beneath him a heavy steel mace, a long-handled weapon, terminating in a knob-studded ball. The sight of these preparations sent the spectators inte a frenzy. Bets were laid for and against the mace, which had many partisans as a close-combat weapon.

Lusignac was plainly worried. The one course with the lances had probably convinced him that he faced a man skilled in the use of knightly weapons. Moreover, he perhaps dreaded the mace, for all men knew that he who wields a mace against a long sword must be certain of his ability to land a blow.

"*Allez*!"

Lusignac rushed, his sword straight ahead, forming of his arm and long blade a sort of lance. The stranger had started at a slower pace, and seemed to falter. He swerved his horse broad-side to Lusignac, presenting the flank.

"Craven!" shouted one of the soldiers. "He avoids the shock!"

But the stranger completed his maneuver, brought his mount forward at a gallop, now on Lusignac's left side. Bewildered by this daring maneuver, the captain hesitated a second between shifting his sword to the left hand, or twisting in the saddle to strike. He hesitated too long. The challenger, following his plan, was upon him. His hand flashed to the captain's shoulderpiece, Lusignac was flung down across the stranger's saddle. His sword went clattering out of his hand. The mace rose and fell, blows ringing out like a blacksmith's hammer on an anvil, on the beaten man's back, shoulders, and head. Then, satisfied that he was *hors de combat*, the unknown knight flung his opponent to the ground.

The crowd rushed to Lusignac. His squire removed the helmet. The eyes were wide, lusterless. Two streams of blood seeped from the nostrils, and stained the bandage on the face.

"Dead," said someone.

LAHURE recovered in time to witness Lusignac's defeat. "Who is the knight?" he asked Miron.

Without replying directly, Miron stood before the assembly, cleared his throat importantly.

"Guillaume des Barres!' he proclaimed. "Lord of Oissery, Forfry, Saint-Pathus, Ogives, Gondreville and Ferte-Alais!"

Cheers sounded. Guillaume des Barres, the best lance of the age, the hero of the third Crusade, of Bouvines, of fifty battles and twenty sieges! He who had twice stretched Richard the Lion-Heart, King of England and Aquitaine, in the tournaments at the camp before Acre. No wonder Lusignac had gone down!

Lahure touched Miron on the elbow.

"I must thank him," he said.

Miron shook his head.

"No. He doesn't know that he fought for thee. I merely informed him that Lusignac had cast a defiance to all for this day. Lord des Barres is traveling to accomplish a vow, and was glad of the opportunity to perform."

"Nevertheless, I shall thank him,"' Lahure said. "My cause was just, and he fights for the right, does he not?"

"As thou wilt," Miron said with a shrug.

Des Barres had removed his helmet, and called for a pot of wine. He drank in long swallows, holding the pewter container with both hands. Lahure noticed that his hair was almost white, his neck gaunt. Des Barres was nearer to sixty than fifty, but fought like a young man.

Lahure approached, bent one knee.

"I humbly thank you, my lord."

Des Barres looked at him for a moment.

"Oh, was it thy quarrel I fought, my man? A petty cause, in truth," and he turned his head away, to finish his wine.

Later, he dismounted, and entered the castle, to visit the master.

Lahure approached Lusignac's body, looked down in the sunburned, still face.

"A bad knight," Miron remarked.

"The other was no better," Lahure said stolidly. "Hero though he be."

The love of fighting had impelled Lusignac to quarrel with him. The love of fighting had caused Bertrand de Baucy's foolhardy move down the trail in the thunder-storm. And Guillaume des Barres had had no other urge in his

encounter with the captain. And Lahure, whose indignation had been deep, suddenly understood, compared that passion with his own for the hunt. Each man to his own game. Was one to be blamed more than another?

He turned to thank Miron, found the clerk gone. A soldier offered him his crossbow.

"Thy weapon. Thou art free."

Lahure took his piece, and walked to the draw-bridge. As he reached the open, Miron ran to him from the hall door.

"Taxes lifted for a year all around!" he said. "Lord de Baucy so vows in the hope of regaining his sight. And thy privilege is acknowledged."

"Thank you all," said Lahure.

He took the trail to his mountain home. He reached the open space, where he had stood at twilight four days before. He stared long at the castle. Of the leaders, one was blind, the other dead. He, Lahure, was free.

A sudden thought came to him. He took the bag of gold given him by Lusignac on the previous afternoon, opened it and held the shining coins in his palm. With the amount, he could seek fortune elsewhere, go to the cities, become an armorer. There was need for men of his skill.

He looked again at the mountains, then threw the gold into the grass.

12: Beyond Words

Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

1889-1955

McCall's, April 1931

YOUNG Mrs. Frieze went to market that morning in person, because, in hard times like this, it was her duty to be as economical as possible. It was her first appearance as a marketer, but she knew her job very well; she had made a study of food values and household economics and the cook had given her a detailed list of what she needed.

She was also perfectly aware that customers should be waited upon in turn. She knew there was no reason why. Mrs. Tony Frieze, blonde and slender and eegant, in her short fur jacket and her smart little béret, everything about her neat and quietly elegant, should be served before anyone else. Of course, the grocer didn't know who she was yet....

Just before her at the counter was a girl of perhaps twenty-two or three, her own age, and pretty enough, too, in her way, tall, lean, long-limbed with a sort of careless grace about her. She was hatless, her face was carelessly made up, with too much rouge on the high cheek-bones, and she was dressed in a tweed suit that needed pressing.

"Well, I thought it was twelve cents," she was saying, in a low, rather husky voice.

"That's the small size," said the grocer.

"Well, I'll— Will you let me see it please!"

He pushed a package across the counter, and she took it up in her thin, supple, ill-kept hands.

"How many breakfasts does it make?" she asked.

"Directions on the package, Mrs. Lever."

She stood holding the package, looking at it with an odd expression in her gray eyes.

"All right! I'll try this," she said. "Charge it, will you?"

"Sorry, Mrs. Lever..." said the grocer. "But I got orders... Las' month's account—"

The girl threw the package down on the counter and walked out, and it was Mrs. Tony Frieze's turn now. She read off her list in a polite voice; she was very particular; she knew the price of things; she had to examine tins and bottles to be sure they contained no preservatives. And all the time she kept glancing down at the twelve-cent package of cereal that the girl had left.

"She didn't look as if she didn't even have twelve cents," she thought. "But, after all, how could you tell? Perhaps her husband's out of work."

She had a dread of seeming impertinent or meddlesome, but, she thought, suppose that girl had had no money, nothing to eat, that girl who had stood at her side? She was half-prepared to question the grocer, but he had already turned to another customer, and she was afraid it would be ridiculous for her to stand there waiting until he was free again, and that very likely he would think her officious and refuse to tell her anything.

She walked home to her apartment near Washington Square, in the bright November morning, so troubled that as soon as she got home she telephoned to her husband.

"Tony!..."

"Oh, hello, Mimi!"

"Tony... I just wanted to ask you... Tony, are conditions really very bad?"

"What conditions?"

"I mean, Tony, are there really lots of people out of work? People with—nothing?"

"It's bad enough," he answered. "But what's troubling you, Mimi?"

"Something I saw this morning. It bothers me, Tony."

"Better come down and lunch with me, and tell me about it," he said. "One o'clock, the usual place."

SHE was punctual, as was her habit, but he was there in the restaurant before her. He came toward her as she entered, a dark, lean, impatient young man, not much given to smiling. But he smiled at her.

The head-waiter showed them to a table, their table, they called it, and Tony took up the menu.

"Oh, not a steak, Tony!" she protested.

"You've got to," he said. "You've got to eat plenty of meat in this weather."

"Tony, I'm the healthiest person in the world!"

But he would not believe that. Her blonde beauty seemed to him terribly fragile; sometimes when he saw her asleep, he was seized with sheer terror; he would kiss her to make her wake up and laugh. So she let him order a steak, so that he should not worry.

"Now, what was it that you saw this morning?"

She told him about the girl and the twelve-cent package of cereal, and he listened to her with an air of frowning attention.

"Yes, but, Mimi," he said, "she may have been one of those people who never pay their bills."

"I'm sure she wasn't, Tony. She was a proud-looking person."

"Well, she may have been offended by that fellow, and simply gone to some other shop."

"No, Tony, I'm sure she was in trouble. It just haunts me, Tony, to think of people—right at our door —who haven't got twelve cents. I shouldn't have let her go. I could have said something—made friends with her."

Her eyes had grown misty; she turned away her head.

"Mimi," he said, "you've got the finest nature I ever knew... Your skin's got a sort of golden tinge...."

"Oh, Tony!"

"Love me, beautiful?"

"Love you, Tony."

They were silent for a minute.

"Look here!" he said, presently. "Please don't let this worry you so, Mimi. We'll see what can be done."

After lunch she had to hurry away to a meeting of a guild she belonged to. After that there was a tea, and then she had to dress, to go to a dinner with Tony, and later they went on to a dance. It was after three when they got home, and no one waked her in the morning.

When she opened her eyes, Tony had gone to the office, and the cook had already been to market. She remembered Mrs. Lever, and she made a note on her engagement calendar: "*See grocer re Mrs. L.*" But it was a very full day, and she had no time to go.

That night they were dining with the Crabbes. She did not like to go there; she was sure they had a bad influence on Tony, but she had made up her mind in the very beginning to be perfectly fair and reasonable and tactful about Tony's friends.

Tony had a suspicion of her feeling about the Crabbes, and he was unusually tender and gallant before they left. She was wearing a new white frock, from her trousseau, and a short black velvet wrap with an ermine collar; she knew, and was joyous in knowing that she looked lovely, distinguished, a bride to do Tony credit. After all she was glad to go to the Crabbes, or anywhere else in the world, as long as she could go with Tony, and he was happy.

IT WAS incredible that this should have happened. She was dazed, sick with disappointment and misery. When they were in the car going home, he. wanted to tell her he was sorry but she stopped him.

"I'd rather not talk about it, please, Tony," she said.

The car stopped before the apartment house, and the chauffeur sprang down to open the door. He must notice; the doorman must notice.... Tony, with his silk hat at the back of his head, his brows raised in an expression of annoyed surprise, and far from steady on his feet... .

They went up in the elevator; the boy must notice. But fortunately the maid was not sitting up for them. Tony had great trouble with the latchkey. She stood by, not saying a word.

As soon as they were inside, and the door closed, she said: "Good night, Tony. I hope you sleep well."

"Mimi...!" he cried.

"I'm going to sleep in the guest room, Tony," she said, and went on, down the hall.

But she had to get some of her things from the bedroom, and she saw Tony in there, sitting on his bed, in his shirtsleeves and waistcoat, his head in his hands. She paused a moment, "Good night Tony." He did not even look up.

She gathered together her things, and took them into the guest room. She went through all her routine, washed, put lotion on her face and hands, brushed her hair and her teeth, with tears raining down her cheeks. Then she got into bed and turned out the light, but soon she got up again, turned on the light, and, in dressing gown and slippers, sat down to think.

"Perhaps I expected too much of Tony," she thought, drying her eyes. "Perhaps I ought to have tried to help him more."

She felt very tired, but very clearheaded and resolute.

"I've been silly myself," she thought. "I haven't done any of the things I planned to do— the reading, and lectures, and things.... I haven't even kept inside our budget.... I've only been to market once."

Her little clock had an alarm; she set it for eight.

"I'm going to reorganize my life," she thought, weeping again. "I can't expect to help Tony, if I don't even keep myself up to the mark."

When the alarm rang next morning, she got up at once. She had a cold shower and then went quietly into the bedroom, to get the clothes she needed. Tony was asleep, with one arm flung out on the pillow. And he didn't look disgusting or gross; he looked like a tired boy, pale, his dark hair damp on his forehead.

"Oh, Tony!" she cried in her heart. "Oh, Tony! I know you didn't mean that to happen!"

She went on tiptoe over to the bed, and kissed him softly. And just at that moment Anna knocked at the door; he opened his eyes and sat up.

"My head!" he muttered.

"Go to sleep again, Tony. I'll telephone to the office."

"I can't," he said, and called, "All right, Anna!"

He looked so haggard and miserable. She sat down beside him and put her arm about him.

"Mimi," he said, "I'm so sorry. Don't hate me, Mimi!"

"Tony, I couldn't ever, ever do anything but love you. My poor Tony."

They clung to each other, both with a strange heartache that was half ecstasy. They hadn't thought it would ever come to this, yet it was the loveliest moment.

While Tony was taking his cold bath, she tried to remember what had been done for that girl at the houseparty in New Haven. She remembered how disgusted she herself had been, but the others had been kind.

"I was hard," thought Mimi. "I didn't understand anything, in those days. What was it they gave her? Olive oil, I'm almost sure." She went into the kitchen, not miserable now to think of the servants knowing about Tony. Let them know! Nobody on earth had any right to criticize Tony.

She asked for olive oil, and the cook brought her a bottle. She selected one of her prettiest glasses, a ruby-red goblet, which she half-filled with oil; then she put in a cube of ice, to make it more palatable, and took it to him.

He had just finished shaving; he looked pale, subdued, very neat.

"This will do you good Tony."

He accepted the red goblet and drank its contents. Then he took her in his arms, and she raised her hand and patted his cheek. "Oh, Tony!" she said. "I wasn't nice to you!"

"You were, my darling Mimi! I want you to be like that."

"It's all over now, Tony."

"But I'm still sorry, Mimi."

But something was changed, something new had come into her love for him, After he had gone, she went into the bedroom, and hung up his dressing gown, straightened his toilet things, wished very much there was something more she could do for him.

The cook brought her the marketlist; she went over it carefully, then she put on her fur jacket and her hat and gloves, and set out. And she remembered the twelve-cent package and that girl.

She was resolute about it this morning. When she went into the grocer's she ordered conscientiously from her list; then she said:

"Can you give me Mrs. Lever's address, please?"

If the man was surprised by the request, he did not show it. He wrote down an address on West Fourth Street. Mrs. Frieze went there.

It was an old-fashioned apartmenthouse, dingy and shabby. In the vestibule she found a bell labeled "Lever." She pressed it, and the door clicked open. A voice called: "Did you want Lever?"

She recognized the voice, and saw the girl herself, leaning over the railing. "Yes, please. May I talk to you?" she replied eagerly.

"What about?" asked the girl, not rudely, but with a sort of uncompromising directness.

"Do you mind if I come up?" asked Mimi. "Then I can explain better."

"Come ahead!" said the girl.

"I don't mean to be impertinent, said Mimi. "And, of course, I may be entirely wrong. But I saw you in the grocer's, the other morning and—" She hesitated a moment. "I just had a feeling— that something was wrong with you, and I thought I'd just ask if I could do anything."

The other girl said nothing, and it was too dark to read her face.

"You know how it is," said Mimi. "You do have that feeling about people, sometimes."

Still the girl was silent, and Mimi thought she must be angry.

But then she said abruptly: "It's funny for you to say that.... All night I had a feeling like that, about someone...."

She opened the door behind her. "Won't you come in?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Lever," said Mimi.

It was a very bare little room, nothing much in it but two wicker chairs and a lumpy couch and a bamboo table on which stood a fern in a green pot. But it was neat and somehow attractive.

"I'm not Mrs. Lever," said the girl. "I'm not Mrs anybody."

"I'm sorry." Mimi unbuttoned the collar of her jacket. "May I sit down?" she asked and the girl took a chair opposite her.

SHE was dressed in a dark skirt and a white sleeveless blouse, that showed the fine, strong lines of her lean body.

"I'm sorry you were worried last night," said Mimi.

"I just had that feeling," said the girl, "that something had happened to Sam. But I rang up the office, and they said the ship had docked yesterday all right."

"What does he do?" asked Mimi.

"He's second mate on a cargo boat running down to Cuba. TIl show you his picture." She took down a framed photograph from the mantel and brought it to Mimi.

"That's Sam," she said.

An arrogant young devil, he was, with his cap a little to one side; big, burly, laughing. '"He's a holy terror," said the girl, smiling softly.

Mimi looked at the picture.

"I'm glad he's got a job," she said seriously. "My husband says conditions are bad."

"You're right," said the girl. "I've been out of work for three months."

"Please excuse me if I'm meddlesome, but can't he help out a little?"

"No," said the girl. "You see, Sam's got his mother to look after. She's sort of broken down. She's had a hard life. He was pretty wild when he was younger, and he wants to make it up to her. He wants her to have some kind of comfort now, when she's old. She's in a sort of private home, and it's expensive. And he

got in trouble last year. He had to get money in advance from the company he works for, and they take it out of his pay every month. He hasn't got anything now, but what he pays for his mother. It wasn't any real bad trouble he was in. He just didn't realize...."

She put the picture back on the mantel and went to the window.

"Nobody can say it's Sam's fault," she went on. "He's doing the best he can. Only it'll be six months before he gets that money paid off. First he said we couldn't get married, on account of that money, and his mother. But then he saw itd be all right, with me working. I had a good job, in a department store. I'd saved up something. I found this flat, and I got this furniture. I've paid two installments on it. I thought I'd live here till he came back. We were going to get married today.... Then they laid me off. And I can't find another job. ... They'll take the furniture away.... Well, all right! I guess we won't need it yet awhile."

"Aren't you going to get married?"

"No. I can make up some reason."

"Aren't you going to tell him how bad things are?"

"No!" the girl cried. "I couldn't! It'd be like telling him to choose between me and his mother. He can't help us both. I'd rather be dead than do that. He'd be just about crazy with worry. He'd just do anything for me—only he hasn't anything.... He was so happy to think of our getting married and having our own home.... I just made up my mind that tonight he'd get his good dinner and all — everything nice and cozy.

"I borrowed some money off my sister. I wouldn't have done it, only—" She paused a moment. "Only, you know the way you feel about a man."

"I know," said Mimi, and they were both silent for a time. "You said his ship got in yesterday. I suppose—"

"I guess he went up to see his mother," said the girl. "I thought maybe he'd telephone last night, but, you see, sometimes there's another ship comes in, with friends on board he hasn't seen for a long time. Sometimes he sort of loses track of the time. I'm just a fool to worry so...."

She turned to Mimi, and tried to smile. "I'm just a fool!" she said.

"I'll find you a job," said Mimi.

Even Tony didn't understand. She went down to lunch with him, and when she told him, he said, "Of course, it's all right to find her a job but she'd be a great deal better off without him, if you ask me."

It was very hard to find a job for the girl. In the end Mimi bullied Madame Fidèle.

"If you'll give her a place with you, you'll see a lot of me this winter. And I'll bring my friends."

That worked. She hurried off to telephone Mrs. Lever to see Madame Fidéle at once, and, just as she was finishing her lunch, the girl telephoned.

"I got that job, Mrs. Frieze."

"Has— Sam come yet?"

The girl did not answer for a moment. "Not yet," she said gayly. "TI let you know."

All afternoon, while she played bridge, Mimi was half-sick with anxiety, waiting to hear about Sam. She went home and sat by the window, waiting for Tony. It was dark outside, and cold, and the wind blew.

When at last he came, she flew to him, held him tight. "Oh, Tony!"

"What's the matter, darling?"

"Nothing," she answered. Because he wouldn't understand.

THEY were dining at home that night, They sat down at the table, softly lighted by candles, set with their wedding china and silver, but Mimi could not eat.

"Something is the matter!" cried Tony, as if he were furious. "Why don't you eat, Mimi?"

"I'm just not awfully hungry."

But she was thinking of that girl.

"Let's go out somewhere and dance."

"Oh, Tony, I couldn't!"

"Look here!" he began, when the telephone rang, and she sprang up to answer it.

"Mrs. Frieze?" asked a voice. "It's me— Katherine Lever. I just wanted to tell you— Sam's home!"

"Oh...! Sam's home!" cried Mimi, for Tony to hear.

"He got back just in time for us to go down and get a license," the girl went on. "Were going to get married tonight, at my sister's."

"Then he was all right?"

"He met some friends and— just sort of lost track of the time."

As Mimi turned away from the telephone, tears were running down her face. "Mimi!" cried Tony. "My darling girl! Why do you worry so about these people?"

"Because— I love you so, Tony!" she answered, with a wavering smile

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13: Madame La Gimp

Damon Runyon

1880-1946

Cosmopolitan Oct 1929

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ONE NIGHT I am passing the corner of Fiftieth Street and Broadway, and what do I see but Dave the Dude standing in a doorway talking to a busted-down old Spanish doll by the name of Madame La Gimp. Or rather Madame La Gimp is talking to Dave the Dude, and what is more he is listening to her, because I can hear him say yes, yes, as he always does when he is really listening to anybody, which is very seldom.

Now this is a most surprising sight to me, because Madame La Gimp is not such an old doll as anybody will wish to listen to, especially Dave the Dude. In fact, she is nothing but an old haybag, and generally somewhat ginned up. For fifteen years, or maybe sixteen, I see Madame La Gimp up and down Broadway, or sliding along through the Forties, sometimes selling newspapers, and sometimes selling flowers, and in all these years I seldom see her but what she seems to have about half a heat on from drinking gin.

Of course, nobody ever takes the newspapers she sells, even after they buy them off of her, because they are generally yesterday's papers, and sometimes last week's, and nobody ever wants her flowers, even after they pay her for them, because they are flowers such as she gets off an undertaker over in Tenth Avenue, and they are very tired flowers, indeed.

Personally, I consider Madame La Gimp nothing but an old pest, but kind-hearted guys like Dave the Dude always stake her to a few pieces of silver when she comes shuffling along putting on the moan about her tough luck. She walks with a gimp in one leg, which is why she is called Madame La Gimp, and years ago I hear somebody say Madame La Gimp is once a Spanish dancer, and a big shot on Broadway, but that she meets up with an accident which puts her out of the dancing dodge, and that a busted romance makes her become a gin-head.

I remember somebody telling me once that Madame La Gimp is quite a beauty in her day, and has her own servants, and all this and that, but I always hear the same thing about every bum on Broadway, male and female, including some I know are bums, in spades, right from taw, so I do not pay any attention to these stories.

Still, I am willing to allow that maybe Madame La Gimp is once a fair looker, at that, and the chances are has a fair shape, because once or twice I see her when she is not ginned up, and has her hair combed, and she is not so bad-looking, although even then if you put her in a claiming race I do not think there is any danger of anybody claiming her out of it.

Mostly she is wearing raggedy clothes, and busted shoes, and her grey hair is generally hanging down her face, and when I say she is maybe fifty years old I am giving her plenty the best of it. Although she is Spanish, Madame La Gimp talks good English, and in fact she can cuss in English as good as anybody I ever hear, barring Dave the Dude.

Well, anyway, when Dave the Dude sees me as he is listening to Madame La Gimp, he motions me to wait, so I wait until she finally gets through gabbing to him and goes gimping away. Then Dave the Dude comes over to me looking much worried.

'This is quite a situation,' Dave says. 'The old doll is in a tough spot. It seems that she once has a baby which she calls by the name of Eulalie, being it is a girl baby, and she ships this baby off to her sister in a little town in Spain to raise up, because Madame La Gimp figures a baby is not apt to get much raising-up off of her as long as she is on Broadway. Well, this baby is on her way here. In fact,' Dave says, 'she will land next Saturday and here it is Wednesday already.'

'Where is the baby's papa?' I ask Dave the Dude.

'Well,' Dave says, 'I do not ask Madame La Gimp this, because I do not consider it a fair question. A guy who goes around this town asking where babies' papas are, or even who they are, is apt to get the name of being nosey. Anyway, this has nothing whatever to do with the proposition, which is that Madame La Gimp's baby, Eulalie, is arriving here.

'Now,' Dave says, 'it seems that Madame La Gimp's baby, being now eighteen years old, is engaged to marry the son of a very proud old Spanish nobleman who lives in this little town in Spain, and it also seems that the very proud old Spanish nobleman, and his ever-loving wife, and the son, and Madame La Gimp's sister, are all with the baby. They are making a tour of the whole world, and will stop over here a couple of days just to see Madame La Gimp.'

'It is commencing to sound to me like a movie such as a guy is apt to see at a midnight show,' I say.

'Wait a minute,' Dave says, getting impatient: 'You are too gabby to suit me. Now it seems that the proud old Spanish noble man does not wish his son to marry any lob, and one reason he is coming here is to look over Madame La Gimp, and see that she is okay. He thinks that Madame La Gimp's baby's own papa is dead, and that Madame La Gimp is now married to one of the richest and most aristocratic guys in America.'

'How does the proud old Spanish nobleman get such an idea as this?' I ask. 'It is a sure thing he never sees Madame La Gimp, or even a photograph of her as she is at present.'

'I will tell you how,' Dave the Dude says. 'It seems Madame La Gimp gives her baby the idea that such is the case in her letters to her. It seems Madame La

Gimp does a little scrubbing business around a swell apartment hotel in Park Avenue that is called the Marberry, and she cops stationery there and writes her baby in Spain on this stationery, saying this is where she lives, and how rich and aristocratic her husband is. And what is more, Madame La Gimp has letters from her baby sent to her care of the hotel and gets them out of the employees' mail.'

'Why,' I say, 'Madame La Gimp is nothing but an old fraud to deceive people in this manner, especially a proud old Spanish nobleman. And,' I say, 'this proud old Spanish nobleman must be something of a chump to believe a mother will keep away from her baby all these years, especially if the mother has plenty of dough, although of course I do not know just how smart a proud old Spanish nobleman can be.'

'Well,' Dave says, 'Madame La Gimp tells me the thing that makes the biggest hit of all with the proud old Spanish nobleman is that she keeps her baby in Spain all these years because she wishes her raised up a true Spanish baby in every respect until she is old enough to know what time it is. But I judge the proud old Spanish nobleman is none too bright, at that,' Dave says, 'because Madame La Gimp tells me he always lives in his little town which does not even have running water in the bathrooms.

'But what I am getting at is this,' Dave says. 'We must have Madame La Gimp in a swell apartment in the Marberry with a rich and aristocratic guy for a husband by the time her baby gets here, because if the proud old Spanish nobleman finds out Madame La Gimp is nothing but a bum, it is a hundred to one he will cancel his son's engagement to Madame La Gimp's baby and break a lot of people's hearts, including his son's.

'Madame La Gimp tells me her baby is daffy about the young guy, and he is daffy about her, and there are enough broken hearts in this town as it is. I know how I will get the apartment, so you go and bring me Judge Henry G. Blake for a rich and aristocratic husband, or anyway for a husband.'

Well, I know Dave the Dude to do many a daffy thing, but never a thing as daffy as this. But I know there is no use arguing with him when he gets an idea, because if you argue with Dave the Dude too much he is apt to reach over and lay his Sunday punch on your snoot, and no argument is worth a punch on the snoot, especially from Dave the Dude.

So I go out looking for Judge Henry G. Blake to be Madame La Gimp's husband, although I am not so sure Judge Henry G. Blake will care to be anybody's husband, and especially Madame La Gimp's after he gets a load of her, for Judge Henry G. Blake is kind of a classy old guy.

To look at Judge Henry G. Blake, with his grey hair, and his nose glasses, and his stomach, you will think he is very important people, indeed. Of course, Judge Henry G. Blake is not a judge, and never is a judge, but they call him Judge

because he looks like a judge, and talks slow, and puts in many long words, which very few people understand.

They tell me Judge Blake once has plenty of dough, and is quite a guy in Wall Street, and a high shot along Broadway, but he misses a few guesses at the market, and winds up without much dough, as guys generally do who miss guesses at the market. What Judge Henry G. Blake does for a living at this time nobody knows, because he does nothing much whatever, and yet he seems to be a producer in a small way at all times.

Now and then he makes a trip across the ocean with such as Little Manuel, and other guys who ride the tubs, and sits in with them on games of bridge, and one thing and another, when they need him. Very often when he is riding the tubs, Little Manuel runs into some guy he cannot cheat, so he has to call in Judge Henry G. Blake to outplay the guy on the level, although of course Little Manuel will much rather get a guy's dough by cheating him than by outplaying him on the level. Why this is, I do not know, but this is the way Little Manuel is.

Anyway, you cannot say Judge Henry G. Blake is a bum, especially as he wears good clothes, with a wing collar, and a derby hat, and most people consider him a very nice old man. Personally I never catch the judge out of line on any proposition whatever, and he always says hello to me, very pleasant.

It takes me several hours to find Judge Henry G. Blake, but finally I locate him in Derle's billiards-room playing a game of pool with a guy from Providence, Rhode Island. It seems the judge is playing the guy from Providence for five cents a ball, and the judge is about thirteen balls behind when I step into the joint, because naturally at five cents a ball the judge wishes the guy from Providence to win, so as to encourage him to play for maybe twenty-five cents a ball, the judge being very cute this way.

Well, when I step in I see the judge miss a shot anybody can make blindfolded, but as soon as I give him the office I wish to speak to him, the judge hauls off and belts in every ball on the table, bingity-bing, the last shot being a bank that will make Al de Oro stop and think, because when it comes to pool, the old judge is just naturally a curly wolf.

Afterwards he tells me he is very sorry I make him hurry up this way, because of course after the last shot he is never going to get the guy from Providence to play him pool even for fun, and the judge tells me the guy sizes up as a right good thing, at that.

Now Judge Henry G. Blake is not so excited when I tell him what Dave the Dude wishes to see him about, but naturally he is willing to do anything for Dave, because he knows that guys who are not willing to do things for Dave the Dude often have bad luck. The judge tells me that he is afraid he will not make much of a husband because he tries it before several times on his own hook and is always a bust, but as long as this time it is not to be anything serious, he will

tackle it. Anyway, Judge Henry G. Blake says, being aristocratic will come natural to him.

Well, when Dave the Dude starts out on any proposition, he is a wonder for fast working. The first thing he does is to turn Madame La Gimp over to Miss Billy Perry, who is now Dave's ever-loving wife which he takes out of tap-dancing in Miss Missouri Martin's Sixteen Hundred Club, and Miss Billy Perry calls in Miss Missouri Martin to help.

This is water on Miss Missouri Martin's wheel, because if there is anything she loves it is to stick her nose in other people's business, no matter what it is, but she is quite a help at that, although at first they have a tough time keeping her from telling Waldo Winchester, the scribe, about the whole cat-hop, so he will put a story in the Morning Item about it, with Miss Missouri Martin's name in it. Miss Missouri Martin does not believe in ever overlooking any publicity bets on the layout.

Anyway, it seems that between them Miss Billy Perry and Miss Missouri Martin get Madame La Gimp dolled up in a lot of new clothes, and run her through one of these beauty joints until she comes out very much changed, indeed. Afterwards I hear Miss Billy Perry and Miss Missouri Martin have quite a few words, because Miss Missouri Martin wishes to paint Madame La Gimp's hair the same colour as her own, which is a high yellow, and buy her the same kind of dresses which Miss Missouri Martin wears herself, and Miss Missouri Martin gets much insulted when Miss Billy Perry says no, they are trying to dress Madame La Gimp to look like a lady.

They tell me Miss Missouri Martin thinks some of putting the slug on Miss Billy Perry for this crack, but happens to remember just in time that Miss Billy Perry is now Dave the Dude's everloving wife, and that nobody in this town can put the slug on Dave's ever-loving wife, except maybe Dave himself.

Now the next thing anybody knows, Madame La Gimp is in a swell eight-or nine-room apartment in the Marberry, and the way this comes about is as follows: It seems that one of Dave the Dude's most important champagne customers is a guy by the name of Rodney B. Emerson, who owns the apartment, but who is at his summer home in Newport, with his family, or anyway with his ever-loving wife.

This Rodney B. Emerson is quite a guy along Broadway, and a great hand for spending dough and looking for laughs, and he is very popular with the mob. Furthermore, he is obliged to Dave the Dude, because Dave sells him good champagne when most guys are trying to hand him the old phonus bolonus, and naturally Rodney B. Emerson appreciates this kind treatment.

He is a short, fat guy, with a round, red face, and a big laugh, and the kind of a guy Dave the Dude can call up at his home in Newport and explain the situation and ask for the loan of the apartment, which Dave does. Well, it seems

Rodney B. Emerson gets a big bang out of the idea, and he says to Dave the Dude like this: 'You not only can have the apartment, Dave, but I will come over and help you out. It will save a lot of explaining around the Marberry if I am there.'

So he hops right over from Newport, and joins in with Dave the Dude, and I wish to say Rodney B. Emerson will always be kindly remembered by one and all for his co-operation, and nobody will ever again try to hand him the phonus bolonus when he is buying champagne, even if he is not buying it off of Dave the Dude.

Well, it is coming on Saturday and the boat from Spain is due, so Dave the Dude hires a big town car, and puts his own driver, Wop Sam, on it, as he does not wish any strange driver tipping off anybody that it is a hired car. Miss Missouri Martin is anxious to go to the boat with Madame La Gimp, and take her jazz band, the Hi Hi Boys, from her Sixteen Hundred Club with her to make it a real welcome, but nobody thinks much of this idea. Only Madame La Gimp and her husband Judge Henry G. Blake, and Miss Billy Perry go, though the judge holds out for some time for Little Manuel, because Judge Blake says he wishes somebody around to tip him off in case there are any bad cracks made about him as a husband in Spanish, and Little Manuel is very Spanish.

The morning they go to meet the boat is the first time Judge Henry G. Blake gets a load of his ever-loving wife, Madame La Gimp, and by this time Miss Billy Perry and Miss Missouri Martin give Madame La Gimp such a going-over that she is by no means the worst looker in the world. In fact, she looks first-rate, especially as she is off gin and says she is off it for good.

Judge Henry G. Blake is really quite surprised by her looks, as he figures all along she will turn out to be a crow. In fact, Judge Blake hurls a couple of shots into himself to nerve himself for the ordeal, as he explains it, before he appears to go to the boat. Between these shots, and the nice clothes, and the good cleaning-up Miss Billy Perry and Miss Missouri Martin give Madame La Gimp, she is really a pleasant sight to the judge.

They tell me the meeting at the dock between Madame La Gimp and her baby is very affecting indeed, and when the proud old Spanish nobleman and his wife, and their son, and Madame La Gimp's sister, all go into action, too, there are enough tears around there to float all the battleships we once sink for Spain. Even Miss Billy Perry and Judge Henry G. Blake do some first-class crying, although the chances are the judge is worked up to the crying more by the shots he takes for his courage than by the meeting.

Still, I hear the old judge does himself proud, what with kissing Madame La Gimp's baby plenty, and duking the proud old Spanish nobleman, and his wife, and son, and giving Madame La Gimp's sister a good strong hug that squeezes her tongue out.

It turns out that the proud old Spanish nobleman has white sideburns, and is entitled Conte de Something, so his ever-loving wife is the Contesa, and the son is a very nice-looking quiet young guy any way you take him, who blushes every time anybody looks at him. As for Madame La Gimp's baby, she is as pretty as they come, and many guys are sorry they do not get Judge Henry G. Blake's job as stepfather, because he is able to take a kiss at Madame La Gimp's baby on what seems to be very small excuse. I never see a nicer-looking young couple, and anybody can see they are very fond of each other, indeed.

Madame La Gimp's sister is not such a doll as I will wish to have sawed off on me, and is up in the paints as regards to age, but she is also very quiet. None of the bunch talk any English, so Miss Billy Perry and Judge Henry G. Blake are pretty much outsiders on the way uptown. Anyway, the judge takes the wind as soon as they reach the Marberry, because the judge is now getting a little tired of being a husband. He says he has to take a trip out to Pittsburgh to buy four or five coal-mines, but will be back the next day.

Well, it seems to me that everything is going perfect so far, and that it is good judgment to let it lay as it is, but nothing will do Dave the Dude but to have a reception the following night. I advise Dave the Dude against this idea, because I am afraid something will happen to spoil the whole cat-hop, but he will not listen to me, especially as Rodney B. Emerson is now in town and is a strong booster for the party, as he wishes to drink some of the good champagne he has planted in his apartment.

Furthermore, Miss Billy Perry and Miss Missouri Martin are very indignant at me when they hear about my advice, as it seems they both buy new dresses out of Dave the Dude's bank-roll when they are dressing up Madame La Gimp, and they wish to spring these dresses somewhere where they can be seen. So the party is on.

I get to the Marberry around nine o'clock and who opens the door of Madame La Gimp's apartment for me but Moosh, the door man from Miss Missouri Martin's Sixteen Hundred Club. Furthermore, he is in his Sixteen Hundred Club uniform, except he has a clean shave. I wish Moosh a hello, and he never raps to me but only bows, and takes my hat.

The next guy I see is Rodney B. Emerson in evening clothes, and the minute he sees me he yells out, 'Mister O. O. McIntyre.' Well, of course, I am not Mister O. O. McIntyre, and never put myself away as Mister O. O. McIntyre, and furthermore there is no resemblance whatever between Mister O. O. McIntyre and me, because I am a fairly good-looking guy, and I start to give Rodney B. Emerson an argument, when he whispers to me like this:

'Listen,' he whispers, 'we must have big names at this affair, so as to impress these people. The chances are they read the newspapers back there in Spain,

and we must let them meet the folks they read about, so they will see Madame La Gimp is a real big shot to get such names to a party.'

Then he takes me by the arm and leads me to a group of people in a corner of the room, which is about the size of the Grand Central waiting-room.

'Mister O. O. McIntyre, the big writer!' Rodney B. Emerson says, and the next thing I know I am shaking hands with Mr. and Mrs. Conte, and their son, and with Madame La Gimp and her baby, and Madame La Gimp's sister, and finally with Judge Henry G. Blake, who has on a swallowtail coat, and does not give me much of a tumble. I figure the chances are Judge Henry G. Blake is getting a swelled head already, not to tumble up a guy who helps him get his job, but even at that I wish to say the old judge looks immense in his swallowtail coat, bowing and giving one and all the old castor-oil smile.

Madame La Gimp is in a low-neck black dress and is wearing a lot of Miss Missouri Martin's diamonds, such as rings and bracelets, which Miss Missouri Martin insists on hanging on her, al though I hear afterwards that Miss Missouri Martin has Johnny Brannigan, the plain-clothes copper, watching these diamonds. I wonder at the time why Johnny is there, but figure it is because he is a friend of Dave the Dude's. Miss Missouri Martin is no sucker, even if she is kind-hearted.

Anybody looking at Madame La Gimp will bet you all the coffee in Java that she never lives in a cellar over in Tenth Avenue, and drinks plenty of gin in her day. She has her grey hair piled up high on her head, with a big Spanish comb in it, and she reminds me of a picture I see somewhere, but I do not remember just where. And her baby, Eulalie, in a white dress is about as pretty a little doll as you will wish to see, and nobody can blame Judge Henry G. Blake for copping a kiss off of her now and then.

Well, pretty soon I hear Rodney B. Emerson bawling, 'Mister Willie K. Vanderbilt,' and in comes nobody but Big Nig, and Rodney B. Emerson leads him over to the group and introduces him.

Little Manuel is standing alongside Judge Henry G. Blake, and he explains in Spanish to Mr. and Mrs. Conte and the others that 'Willie K. Vanderbilt' is a very large millionaire, and Mr. and Mrs. Conte seem much interested, anyway, though naturally Madame La Gimp and Judge Henry G. Blake are jerry to Big Nig, while Madame La Gimp's baby and the young guy are interested in nobody but each other.

Then I hear, 'Mister Al Jolson,' and in comes nobody but Tony Bertazzola, from the Chicken Club, who looks about as much like Al as I do like O. O. McIntyre, which is not at all. Next comes 'the Very Reverend John Roach Straton,' who seems to be Skeets Bolivar to me, then 'the Honourable Mayor James J. Walker,' and who is it but Good Time Charley Bernstein.

'Mister Otto H. Kahn,' turns out to be Rochester Red, and 'Mister Heywood Broun' is Nick the Greek, who asks me privately who Heywood Broun is, and gets very sore at Rodney B. Emerson when I describe Heywood Broun to him.

Finally there is quite a commotion at the door and Rodney B. Emerson announces, 'Mister Herbert Bayard Swope' in an extra loud voice which makes everybody look around, but it is nobody but the Pale Face Kid. He gets me to one side, too, and wishes to know who Herbert Bayard Swope is, and when I explain to him, the Pale Face Kid gets so swelled up he will not speak to Death House Donegan, who is only 'Mister William Muldoon.'

Well, it seems to me they are getting too strong when they announce, 'Vice-President of the United States, the Honourable Charles Curtis,' and in pops Guinea Mike, and I say as much to Dave the Dude, who is running around every which way looking after things, but he only says, 'Well, if you do not know it is Guinea Mike, will you know it is not Vice-President Curtis?'

But it seems to me all this is most disrespectful to our leading citizens, especially when Rodney B. Emerson calls, 'The Honourable Police Commissioner, Mister Grover A. Whalen,' and in pops Wild William Wilkins, who is a very hot man at this time, being wanted in several spots for different raps. Dave the Dude takes personal charge of Wild William and removes a rod from his pants pocket, because none of the guests are supposed to come rodded up, this being strictly a social matter.

I watch Mr. and Mrs. Conte, and I do not see that these names are making any impression on them, and I afterwards find out that they never get any newspapers in their town in Spain except a little local bladder which only prints the home news. In fact, Mr. and Mrs. Conte seem somewhat bored, although Mr. Conte cheers up no little and looks interested when a lot of dolls drift in. They are mainly dolls from Miss Missouri Martin's Sixteen Hundred Club, and the Hot Box, but Rodney B. Emerson introduces them as 'Sophie Tucker,' and 'Theda Bara,' and 'Jeanne Eagels,' and 'Helen Morgan,' and 'Aunt Jemima,' and one thing and another.

Well, pretty soon in comes Miss Missouri Martin's jazz band, the Hi Hi Boys, and the party commences getting up steam, especially when Dave the Dude gets Rodney B. Emerson to breaking out the old grape. By and by there is dancing going on, and a good time is being had by one and all, including Mr. and Mrs. Conte. In fact, after Mr. Conte gets a couple of jolts of the old grape, he turns out to be a pretty nice old skate, even if nobody can understand what he is talking about.

As for Judge Henry G. Blake, he is full of speed, indeed. By this time anybody can see that the judge is commencing to believe that all this is on the level and that he is really entertaining celebrities in his own home. You put a quart of good grape inside the old judge and he will believe anything. He soon dances

himself plumb out of wind, and then I notice he is hanging around Madame La Gimp a lot.

Along about midnight, Dave the Dude has to go out into the kitchen and settle a battle there over a crap game, but otherwise everything is very peaceful. It seems that 'Herbert Bayard Swope,' 'Vice-President Curtis,' and 'Grover Whalen' get a little game going, when 'the Reverend John Roach Straton' steps up and cleans them in four passes, but it seems they soon discover that 'the Reverend John Roach Straton' is using tops on them, which are very dishonest dice, and so they put the slug on 'the Reverend John Roach Strawn' and Dave the Dude has to split them out.

By and by I figure on taking the wind, and I look for Mr. and Mrs. Conte to tell them good night, but Mr. Conte and Miss Missouri Martin are still dancing, and Miss Missouri Martin is pouring conversation into Mr. Conte's ear by the bucketful, and while Mr. Conte does not savvy a word she says, this makes no difference to Miss Missouri Martin. Let Miss Missouri Martin do all the talking, and she does not care a whoop if anybody understands her.

Mrs. Conte is over in a corner with 'Herbert Bayard Swope,' or the Pale Face Kid, who is trying to find out from her by using hog Latin and signs on her if there is any chance for a good twenty-one dealer in Spain, and of course Mrs. Conte is not able to make heads or tails of what he means, so I hunt up Madame La Gimp.

She is sitting in a darkish corner off by herself and I really do not see Judge Henry G. Blake leaning over her until I am almost on top of them, so I cannot help hearing what the judge is saying.

'I am wondering for two days,' he says, 'if by any chance you remember me. Do you know who I am?'

'I remember you,' Madame La Gimp says. 'I remember you--oh, so very well, Henry. How can I forget you? But I have no idea you recognize me after all these years.'

'Twenty of them now,' Judge Henry G. Blake says. 'You are beautiful then. You are still beautiful.'

Well, I can see the old grape is working first-class on Judge Henry G. Blake to make such remarks as this, although at that, in the half-light, with the smile on her face, Madame La Gimp is not so bad. Still, give me them carrying a little less weight for age.

'Well, it is all your fault,' Judge Henry G. Blake says. 'You go and marry that chile con carne guy, and look what happens!'

I can see there is no sense in me horning in on Madame La Gimp and Judge Henry G. Blake while they are cutting up old touches in this manner, so I think I will just say good-bye to the young people and let it go at that, but while I am looking for Madame La Gimp's baby, and her guy, I run into Dave the Dude.

'You will not find them here,' Dave says. 'By this time they are being married over at Saint Malachy's with my ever-loving wife and Big Nig standing up with them. We get the licence for them yesterday afternoon. Can you imagine a couple of young saps wishing to wait until they go plumb around the world before getting married?'

Well, of course, this elopement creates much excitement for a few minutes, but by Monday Mr. and Mrs. Conde and the young folks and Madame La Gimp's sister take a train for California to keep on going around the world, leaving us nothing to talk about but about old Judge Henry G. Blake and Madame La Gimp getting themselves married, too, and going to Detroit where Judge Henry G. Blake claims he has a brother in the plumbing business who will give him a job, although personally I think Judge Henry G. Blake figures to do a little booting on his own hook in and out of Canada. It is not like Judge Henry G. Blake to tie himself up to the plumbing business.

So there is nothing more to the story, except that Dave the Dude is around a few days later with a big sheet of paper in his duke and very, very indignant.

'If every single article listed here is not kicked back to the owners of the different joints in the Marberry that they are taken from by next Tuesday night, I will bust a lot of noses around this town,' Dave says. 'I am greatly mortified by such happenings at my social affairs, and everything must be returned at once. Especially,' Dave says, 'the baby grand piano that is removed from Apartment 9D.'

14: The Great Magor Diamond

"Sapper"

H. C. McNeile, 1888-1937

Pearson's Magazine, Dec 1930

Collected in: *When Carruthers Laughed*, 1934

I SUPPOSE, as a law-abiding citizen, I should have informed the police; but I didn't. I think it was the barefaced impudence of the thing that intrigued me; and anyway, what would have been the use of telling a French gendarme the truth concerning the great Magor Diamond mystery? It had happened in England, as all the world knows, five years previously. But much water flows under the bridge in that time: other crimes had flitted across the stage, and even that nine days wonder was forgotten. Besides, as I say, the little blighter intrigued me.

I met him at Aix-les-Bains doing a cure. We were both staying at the Hotel Splendide, and once or twice I had run into him in the bar when we were allowing ourselves a slight fall from grace. He was a small man by the name of Martin— William Martin, of Birmingham. At least, that was what was entered up in the visitors' book; afterwards, I wondered.

His age I put down at about forty-five, though he might have been older. He was clean shaven and his hair was plentifully flecked with grey. But his hands were the most noticeable thing about him. He had for his height quite the longest fingers I have ever seen, especially the top joints, which he could bend back in a most uncanny way. They were, in fact, the fingers of a conjurer, and I was not surprised when, one evening, he did some amazing tricks with a pack of cards for the benefit of two or three of us who happened to be sitting with him. And then, just as he was going to bed he suddenly paused by the door in a startled way.

"Good gracious me, gentlemen," he cried, "how careless of me! You might have suspected all sorts of things."

And I'm dashed if he didn't produce from his pocket two cigarette-cases and a gold watch belonging to us! He roared with laughter, and we laughed too, though not quite so heartily.

"A little proof to the Colonel," he said as he left the room, "that what I can do as an amateur is easy money for the professional."

"Darned sight too easy," growled old Firebrace, who disliked being made a fool of. "Shouldn't wonder if the blighter ain't a professional himself. I know one thing: I wouldn't play cards with him for a pony." And yet no one could have been quieter than he was. He drank the waters and conformed strictly— or as strictly as anybody did— to the rules and regulations of the cure. He read a lot,

principally lives and biographies, and he could talk sensibly on a variety of subjects. In fact, in his quiet way he was distinctly good value for money.

I forget what started the conversation on crime one evening. I was sitting alone with him, and I think there had been an account in the papers of some woman being run in for trying to smuggle silk things through Dover. At any rate, I know I made some remark as to the inequality of the age-old struggle between the criminal and the forces of law and order.

"Sooner or later they all get caught," I said, "and a very good thing too."

For a while he said nothing, though it struck me that the faintest of smiles twitched round his lips. Then: "All is perhaps a slight exaggeration," he remarked, "though I quite agree with your general statement. And yet, there is a fascination in pitting your wits against the whole resources of the police. Finger-prints: flying squads: wireless— all the powers of science ranged against you. Or perhaps I should say ranged against the man who does it." he added with a deprecating wave of the hand.

I bowed: words seemed unnecessary.

"Are you interested in what people call crime?" he asked.

"A rather peculiar way of putting it," I said. "Crime, I take it, is always crime."

"But there are varying degrees," he insisted. "In the eyes of the law perhaps you are right. But I maintain that the man who swindles a poor woman out of a shilling is an infinitely more despicable character, and should be punished far more severely, than the man who relieves a millionaire of several thousand pounds."

"A dangerous doctrine," I remarked; "though I suppose that, from a sentimental point of view, most people would agree with you."

"Now I," he continued, "have always been interested in the study of crime. And from a purely academic angle, I think I may claim to have as much knowledge on the subject as anyone, in the force or out of it. It has always fascinated me, the lone gamble against gigantic odds. And I feel a great admiration for a man when he brings off a big coup and gets away with it."

"Very few of them do," I put in.

"As you say," he agreed, "very few of them do. All the more power then to the very few."

"And even if they get away to begin with," I said, "the pitcher always goes to the well once too often."

"Always?" He raised his eyebrows. "I wonder."

"It's easy to wonder," I said, a little nettled. "There can be no proof either way. After all, if a man isn't caught, it may merely mean that he has given it up and is running straight."

"Of course," he agreed. "And yet that doesn't alter my argument. It may be that by the time he has given it up he has been so successful that it is

unnecessary for him to continue. Naturally, I am not alluding to the petty burglar— the man who breaks into villa residences and pinches the spoons. The man I am referring to is the really big one, who plans perhaps one or, at the most, two coups a year. Who plots and plans and contrives for each of them as an artist does, and whose risk of being caught in his one coup is greater than the little man in his many, because he has so much more to contend with."

"Can you give an example?" I said, interested in spite of myself.

"Many," he answered. "There was the case of the two Vandycks stolen from the chateau of the Prince de Perpignan: the celebrated mail-bag robbery on the liner between Southampton and Cherbourg six months ago: a dozen I could mention. But I think that the one that might amuse you most was the removal of the great Magor diamond from its so-called lawful owner, Sir Rube Jenkins, five years ago."

"Why so-called?" I put in.

He shrugged his shoulders. "You surely know Rube Jenkins's past history," he said. "And the less said about it the better. To my own knowledge there were at least three men who had a prior claim to that stone. However, that is beside the point. Do you recall the story at all?"

"Vaguely," I said. "I remember there was the devil of a song and dance about it in the newspapers."

"And quite right, too," he remarked with spirit. "A work of art is a work of art, whatever be the medium in which it is expressed. And I maintain that that robbery was a very fine example of such a work. I will, if it does not bore you, run over the salient points of the case, and you can judge for yourself."

"There is nothing I should like more," I assured him.

He settled himself comfortably in his chair and lit a cigarette.

"To make things quite clear," he began, "I will go back some years. Mr. Rube Jenkins, as he then was, was one of those products of South Africa who made their money round Kimberley during the diamond rush. And, to put the matter mildly, he was not the most scrupulous of them. It was never brought home to him, but against his name in the dossiers out there the three letters I.D.B. were written in letters of red. Time went on, and from being the owner of a small store he grew to be a wealthy man and finally a millionaire many times over. And it was at that latter stage of his career that the great Magor diamond came into his possession in circumstances which do not bear looking into. At least two men got knifed in the process, and another was shot in a most suspicious manner. Anyway, Rube got the diamond, while three other men got varying terms of imprisonment. And it is of interest to note that all three of them, before they left the court for jail, swore openly from the dock that they would be even with him.

"A month or two later Rube returned to England, bringing with him his wife. And the lady was about the only thing Rube ever possessed in his life that he deserved. It is hard to say which was the more impossible being of the two. In fact, one can only paraphrase the old chestnut of the man at the country hotel: 'Waiter, if this is tea, bring me coffee; and if it's coffee, I'll have tea.' So with Rube and his wife. When you were with either of them alone, it was impossible not to believe that the other was less repulsive. So you sought the other, and found you were wrong. However, their wealth was fabulous, and when they bought Mexbridge Towers, and started spending a fortune on the Turf, Society gradually began to take them up. In fact, you may remember that the year War broke out the devastating spectacle was seen of both of them in the Royal Enclosure at Ascot.

"During the War they turned Mexbridge Towers into a hospital, supplied a Red Cross train in France, and did all the usual things necessary to turn Mrs. Jenkins into Lady of that ilk. And in the fullness of time Rube was made a Knight of the British Empire, which caused those who knew him best to shake with silent laughter.

"The War ended: the wounded were drafted away to other hospitals, and Sir Rube and Lady Jenkins returned to Mexbridge Towers prepared to continue their assault on Society. They bought Old Masters and tapestries, and first editions, and scattered them indiscriminately about the house. They had fifty gardeners, and twenty Rolls-Royces— or perhaps I've reversed the figures: they had grouse moors and deer forests, and salmon rivers. And finally they had the great Magor diamond.

"During the War this celebrated stone had been stored in the strong-room of Rube's bank in London, but now that they had come into residence again he determined that this, his crowning glory, must be on view. And so he had a specially embossed golden cabinet of incredible vulgarity made for it.

"You have doubtless passed at times the window of one of the super chocolate shops in London or Paris, and you have seen reposing in the middle one lone bon-bon. It lies there supreme, with nothing else to distract one's attention. This, then, was his idea. Alone, on a black velvet throne in the middle of the golden cabinet reposed the diamond. The lid was of glass, and cunningly concealed lights shone on this apple of his eye till the reflection almost dazzled the spectator.

"The cabinet, on its four monstrous legs, stood in a downstairs room, which at first sight struck one as being dangerous. But Rube was, in reality, taking no risks. Every known form of burglar-proof apparatus protected that apparently harmless-looking cabinet. The glass, though flawless, was an inch thick: the lock was a special combination, one that was reset daily by Rube himself. But he went much further than that. Not only were the windows and the door fitted

with electric alarms that rang all over the house if they were tampered with, but the cabinet itself, when set, gave anyone who touched it a shock which, even if not strong enough to electrocute them, was powerful enough to lay them out temporarily. And when, in addition to all that, it was known that the diamond was always returned to the London bank when Sir Rube was not in residence, you will realise that it was a pretty tough nut for any burglar to crack.

"But there were still further difficulties to contend with. Two of the men who had gone to prison vowing vengeance against Rube were accounted for. One had died in jail: the other had gone over with the South African contingent and had been killed at Delville Wood. But the third, and most dangerous, still remained. And the Knight of the British Empire was taking no chances. In addition to carrying, himself, a six-shooter with which he was a deadly performer, he kept a couple of prize-fighting toughs about the place as a sort of personal bodyguard. They remained in the background if a house party was there, because their appearance was so awful that they used to spoil the guests' appetites if seen. But their orders were to deal in their own way with any unauthorised man whom they saw loitering in the grounds or near the house."

The little man paused and lit another cigarette.

"So, as I said before," he continued. "I think you will agree that the removal of the Magor diamond was a pretty tough proposition. And that being the case, it was all the greater incentive to the big men to try. Human nature is the same in all branches of life, and the greater the difficulties the keener the zest in overcoming them. But, though two or three attempts were made, failure was registered each time. One man, it is true, negotiated the burglar-proof window in some extraordinary way, but was defeated by the cabinet itself. In fact, when he was found next morning, he was only just alive.

"And so, as years passed and the great Magor diamond still remained in its golden casket. Sir Rube, though he never relaxed his precautions, became more or less contemptuous in his references to the abilities of what he was pleased to call the underworld.

"'Show me the man who will lift that stone he was wont to say, 'and I'll give ten thousand pounds to any charity you like to mention.'

"It was six years ago that the third man of whom I have told you was liberated from jail. His name was Mark Sanderson, and he was just about as dangerous a wild beast as you are ever likely to meet. He had always been a wrong 'un, but his life in prison had made him a hundred times worse. And, somewhat naturally, Rube Jenkins was the principal object of his hatred.

"No sooner had he landed in England than he began to write threatening letters, and Sir Rube at once put the matter in the hands of the police. With a very strange result— one of the strangest perhaps in the whole of the baffling case. Though he gave the police a description of the man, which they

supplemented by reference to South Africa, no trace of Mark Sanderson was ever discovered. He was known to have embarked at Cape Town: he was known to have landed at Southampton, but from that moment he vanished completely, though the letters continued to arrive from widely separated parts of the country with monotonous regularity. It took, of course, a day at least for each one to arrive, and by that time the postmark was useless. Nevertheless, it was a very extraordinary thing, that a man for whom the entire police force was looking should be able to hide himself for nearly a year in England; for it was eleven months after Mark Sanderson landed that the robbery took place. During that time Sir Rube was not idle, He had an electrician down to overhaul and strengthen the whole system round the cabinet. He engaged another prize-fighter to make the total three. But one thing he would not do. To every suggestion that he should store the diamond permanently at his bank he turned a deaf ear. He utterly refused to confess to being frightened of Mark Sanderson, and to do that would have been tantamount to such a confession.

"And so we come to the house party which assembled at Mexbridge Towers for Ascot in the year of the crime, of which, even at the risk of boring you, I will give you a list. There were the Earl and Countess of Shotover; a Colonel and Mrs. Maddox; a stockbroker named Leader and his wife; Professor Rankel, the well-known art connoisseur and enthusiastic lepidopterist; Aaronhaus, the big Hatton Garden diamond man; two girls, whose names I forget, and the host and hostess.

"Not, as you will agree, a very well assorted lot, but Rube, even then, had to be content with what he could get. The Shotovers, as you know, go anywhere provided they are done well; Colonel Maddox and his wife were of much the same brand. They were all four of them chronically hard up. The stockbroker was the senior partner of the firm that Rube employed most; the diamond man was also a business acquaintance; while Professor Rankel had, after much pressing, been persuaded to come to give his opinion on the art treasures. And finally the two girls were there merely to make up the numbers.

"Such, then, was the party that went in to dinner on the night of the Gold Cup. They had all been over to the races: even the Professor had been inveigled into going for the first time in his life. 'It has been a long-standing promise of mine to come and see your collection,' he told his host, 'but attending a horse-race was not part of the bargain. However, if you insist, I will go.'

"And he had gone, leaving Shotover fainting in the hall at his rig. 'My dear Jenkins,' he said feebly, 'the little man can't wear a frock-coat and a bowler. He can't. He mustn't. We shall all be assassinated on the course. And what in the name of fortune is he taking a butterfly-net for?' It was, I may mention, a peculiar fad of the Professor's to carry a butterfly-net and killing-bottle with him wherever he went, and it was only with considerable difficulty, on this occasion,

that he was persuaded to leave them in the car. So great was his enthusiasm for his hobby that had he seen any specimen he wanted fluttering over the course, he would probably have pursued it quite heedless of the racing. But the danger had been averted and a very cheerful party sat down to dine. Shotover had backed a couple of long-priced winners: a horse of Rube's had won one of the smaller races, and a Duchess had nodded to Lady Jenkins by mistake.

"Then quite suddenly the atmosphere changed. A letter was handed on a salver to Rube, and the instant he saw it his face turned purple.

"'When did this come?' he roared.

"'Just been delivered, Sir Rube,' said the butler.

"'Search the grounds, Wilcox,' cried his master. 'Tell Robinson and the others to look everywhere.' Robinson was the chief of the three prize-fighters. 'The insolence of the scoundrel!' he went on furiously. 'It's that blackguard Sanderson again. You remember I told you about him, Shotover?'

"'Why not open the note and see what he has to say?' said the other languidly. Which proceeding made matters worse. Sir Rube's voice became so suffused with rage as to become inaudible, and Lady Shotover, after a moment or two, calmly removed it from his hand.

"'You poor fish,' she read aloud, 'I dare you to hand round the diamond as usual tonight.'

"Now, I may tell you it was the invariable custom, when a house party assembled at Mexbridge Towers, to pass the Magor diamond round from hand to hand one evening after dinner. It was done with due ceremony, and the pleasing idea underlying the performance was that all the honoured guests should be able to say in the future that they had held in their hands for a moment a thing the value of which would have saved hundreds of poor people from starvation.

"'Dares me!' spluttered Sir Rube. 'Dares me! I'll show the rotten cur what I dare and what I don't! And what's more, I'll catch him this time, if he gives me half a chance. I'll show those blundering fools of police how to do their own job.'"

The meal proceeded, but the harmony of the evening was shattered. And things were not improved when they adjourned after dinner, by the Professor, who had in a fit of absent-mindedness left his butterfly-net on the sofa usually patronised by Mrs. Maddox. The lady was about to sit down when his shout of anguish rent the air. 'Woman!' he yelled, 'don't sit down.'

"By a supreme feat of contortion she complied with his request, and glaring at her wrathfully the Professor removed his net and killing-bottle.

"'Six sofas in this room', he rumbled, 'and you must needs choose this one!'

"'How dare you call me woman!' she said shrilly.

"'I thought you were one,' he answered calmly, 'but you know best. Anyway, whatever you are, there's no cause to break my butterfly-net.' He placed it carefully in a corner and began wandering round the room inspecting the pictures. And he was keeping up a running commentary on the unspeakable manner in which they were hung when his host entered with a large revolver in his hand. The ladies shrieked, but Sir Rube held up his hand reassuringly.

"'Please do not be alarmed', he remarked. 'I am just going to say a few words, if I may, for the benefit of those of you who do not know the facts. This evening at dinner the note which I received upset me greatly. It was from a man who has been annoying me considerably for some months past: a man, I may say, who imagines he has some grudge against me. Now, since this note was delivered by hand, the assumption is that the man is about the place. He dared me, you may remember, to carry out the little ceremony of handing round the great Magor diamond. Had it not been for this note I should have postponed it till the last evening of your visit; as it is, however, I propose to kill, if I can, two birds with one stone.

"'Knowing this man to be a desperate character, I think it more than likely that he will make some attempt at a hold-up. He is probably hoping that the effect of his note will be exactly what we are going to let it be. Bluff, you perceive, of the second degree. Now then— what will occur if my surmise is correct? He will enter by the window, which we will open to its full width, and cover us with his revolver. We shall all put up our hands, and at that moment my three men who are hidden on each side of the window will collar him from behind.'

"'That's all very well,' said the Professor, nervously, 'but supposing he lets off his gun? He might hit somebody.'

"'Don't you worry about that, Professor,' laughed Sir Rube. 'My men will see to that. And if there is any trouble, there is always this.' He patted his own revolver significantly. 'Now we will start. But there is one thing I beg of you, ladies— try to appear quite natural. Don't keep glancing at the window, or anything of that sort, or it may give the show away. Leader, would you mind opening it as wide as you can? Thank you. Now if we form a circle: that's right.'

"He placed his revolver on a table behind the cabinet, so that it was quite invisible from the window; then with a flourish he opened the lid. 'The great Magor diamond, ladies and gentlemen,' he said grandiloquently, but, in spite of his warning to the others, his eyes kept darting towards the window. 'The largest and most perfect stone in the world.'

"He picked it up on its velvet stand and with a low bow presented it to Lady Shotover. 'Take it in your hands and feel the weight, dear lady,' he cried. And then in an undertone he added: 'I'm getting back to my revolver.'

"It passed from hand to hand, and everybody dutifully gave forth gurgles of wonder and delight, though it was noticeable that it moved with a rapidity that suggested a red hot stone. No one had the slightest wish to be the temporary possessor of it when the expected visitor materialised. Until, that is, it came to the Professor, who was beyond any thought of such a trifle as the Magor diamond. One of the girls had put it in his hand, but he was quite unconscious of it. For he was staring at a spot on the carpet opposite him, and his eyes were almost coming out of his head.

"'Look,' he whispered hoarsely. 'Heavens! but it is. I know it is. Here, take the bauble.' He literally threw the diamond at Mrs. Maddox, who was sitting next to him, leaped like a maniac for his butterfly-net, and the next moment with a sweep he brought it down on the floor.

"'It is!' he shrieked in an ecstasy, examining the net. 'The killing-bottle! Give me the killing-bottle!'

"'What on earth is it?' cried his host irritably.

"'The killing-bottle! cried the Professor. 'Hurry! hurry!' Somebody gave him the bottle, and with infinite care he inserted it under the net. 'A Death's Head moth,' he explained. 'And a perfect specimen. What luck! What incredible luck!'

"He straightened up and beamed on the company.

"'What a ridiculous fuss to make over a butterfly!' said Mrs. Maddox acidly, but the Professor was impervious to insult. With his killing-bottle in his hands he sat crooning gently to himself, whilst every now and then he held it up to the light to examine it better.

"'After which entertaining interlude,' remarked his host sarcastically, 'we might perhaps return to the trifling subject of my diamond.'

"Mrs. Maddox was still holding it, and once more it started on its round, amidst a chorus of praise. But somehow it rang a little flat; the solemnity of the moment had been spoiled. And Sir Rube, quite justifiably, felt ruffled. Why the deuce did the little fool want to go prancing after a wretched moth in the middle of the ceremony?

"The diamond came to Aaronhaus. Now, at any rate, would come the real appreciation of an expert. 'What do you think of that, my boy?' he said complacently. 'Something like a diamond— what?'

"The Jew looked at it; then at his host. 'Very like it.' he agreed courteously. 'Of course, my dear Jenkins, I should have realised that with the possibility of this man trying to get your stone you would take additional precautions. Still, I congratulate you, I must say.' He examined it again critically. 'Perfect,' he remarked. 'Perfect. Who did it for you?'

"A sudden silence settled on the room. 'What the hell are you talking about? said Sir Rube thickly.

"'This,' said the Jew. 'It's paste, and very perfect paste. And I wondered who had done it.'

"'You lie!' roared his host, snatching it out of the Jew's hand. He examined it himself; then he let it drop on the floor.

"'By God!' 'he said softly, 'you're right!' His eyes roved round the silent circle of people, and there was murder in them. Sir Rube Jenkins of Mexbridge Towers had departed; Rube Jenkins of the mining camp had taken his place. 'Which of you —— did it?' he said even more softly.

"Lord Shotover rose to his feet. 'We have the misfortune to be your guests,' he remarked icily.. 'And as their temporary spokesman I have the honour to inform you that a man who can use the word you have just used in the presence of ladies is a cad and an outsider of the first water.'

"'Maybe,' said the other thickly, picking up his revolver. 'But no one leaves this room till my diamond is handed back. I'll give the culprit half a minute: if it's not forthcoming by then, I send for the police.'

"'What exactly is your accusation? demanded Colonel Maddox.

"'A very simple one,' said the other. 'In the course of my diamond being handed round, somebody has substituted this paste thing for it. Where is the real one?'

"'Probably in that ridiculous bottle of the Professor's,' said Mrs. Maddox venomously.

"One of the girls gave a nervous little laugh, and then gasped. For the entire room was staring at Professor Rankel, whose face had gone the colour of putty.

"'Ridiculous,' he spluttered. 'Absurd.' He clutched the bottle even tighter as Sir Rube advanced towards him. 'I tell you it is absurd!' he cried shrilly.

"'You look as if it was,' snarled his host, levelling his revolver at the Professor's head. 'Give me that bottle!'

"He snatched it from the other's hands, opened it and turned it upside down. And there fell out a very dead moth and the great Magor diamond.

"'You dirty little thief,' said Sir Rube softly as he picked it up. 'So that is why you were prancing round with a butterfly-net.' And then he broke off abruptly, and peered at the diamond. 'But I don't understand,' he stuttered. 'This is paste too!' And even the so-called Professor looked astounded.

"'Am I going dippy?' Sir Rube cried. 'Look, Aaronhaus! That's paste, isn't it?'

"'It certainly is,' agreed the Jew.

"'Then where is my diamond?' said Sir Rube feebly, and Colonel Maddox smiled behind his hand.

"'Where indeed?' he murmured pointedly.

"'What do you mean?' demanded the other.

"'As to where your diamond is, I'm afraid I can't help you,' said the soldier, 'except to remark that it certainly is not in this room.'

"'But it was,' spluttered the other. 'You all saw me take it out of the cabinet.'

"'We saw nothing of the sort,' answered the soldier. 'We saw you take something out of the cabinet which you told us was the diamond, and which we believed to be the diamond.' A murmur of assent came from the others. 'This— er— person,' continued Colonel Maddox, indicating the Professor, had evidently conceived the friendly idea of substituting a paste stone for the genuine one. Unfortunately— or, perhaps, in view of that chance shot of my wife's, fortunately for him— he only substituted one piece of paste for another.'

"'Do you mean to say I shouldn't have noticed that it was paste when I took it out?' cried Sir Rube.

"'Hold hard again,' said Lord Shotover. 'You didn't take it in your hand. You gave it to my wife on that velvet thing.'

"And once more there came a murmur of assent. 'I expect that man you were talking about stole it before we came in,' said one of the girls, and Sir Rube— all the bluster out of him— could only stare at her dazedly.

"'That is a possible solution,' agreed the soldier. 'And if so, I fear he's away by this time. But you must go back further. When was the last time you actually handled the diamond yourself, Jenkins?'

"'About three months ago.'

"The Colonel shrugged his shoulders. 'Then at any time during those three months the substitution may have taken place,' he remarked. I'm very sorry for you, my dear fellow, especially as I know you thought this place was burglar-proof. But in my humble opinion there's nothing that has yet been constructed by man that can't be opened by him. Don't you agree, Shotover?'

"'Most certainly,' said the other. 'Couldn't have put it clearer myself."

"And at that it was left. No trace of Mark Sanderson was ever discovered. In fact, he has never been heard of again. And, after much discussion, in which the soldier played a prominent part, it was decided that the Professor had been sufficiently punished by the disgrace he had incurred, and his share in the proceedings was glossed over."

The little man paused, and called the barman. "What's yours?" he said.

"But, dash it, man," I cried, "you can't leave it like that. What had really happened?"

"Well," he remarked, "the popular theory was the one put forward by the girl— that Mark Sanderson stole it while the party was at dinner, and then sent the note to make his revenge the more complete."

"And your theory?" I demanded.

"Is, of course, purely academic," he said, taking a sip of his drink. "You appreciate, naturally, the main difficulty that confronted the thief. To substitute a paste diamond for the genuine article was child's play, but to hide the real one was a very different matter. A police search is no joke. A thing the size of the

Magor diamond would most certainly have been discovered. It was, therefore, imperative to prevent a search, and they hit on a very clever ruse to achieve their object.

"There were two paste stones. When the real diamond came to the Professor, he passed it on to Mrs. Maddox, and made a diversion over an imaginary moth. He had one already in the killing-bottle, and he slipped one of the paste stones in as well. Taking advantage of the excitement, Mrs. Maddox substituted the other paste stone for the genuine diamond, which finally came to Aaronhaus and was at once discovered, she having the real one in her bag.

"Now came the moment. She had already quarrelled with the Professor: what more natural than her acid remark about the killing-bottle? To the others it was an arrow at a venture, which, by a wild fluke, hit the mark; but the whole thing was, of course, carefully premeditated. And immediately a red herring was drawn over the trail.

"Then came in the Colonel, who proceeded to dominate the situation. He suggested a plausible theory to which everyone assented, and Sir Rube was so dumbfounded over the whole business that he agreed as well. The danger of a search was over.

"Now they were in clover. The only man who could possibly be arrested was the Professor, but there was nothing incriminating on him. True, he had evidently gone to Mexbridge Towers with the intention of stealing the diamond, but he hadn't succeeded. The utmost that could happen to him was a short term of imprisonment, and punishing him didn't help Sir Rube to get his diamond back, which was all he cared about.

"Finally, Mark Sanderson. Well, it is a strange coincidence, but on landing at Southampton he was met by a man who bore a slight resemblance to Colonel Maddox. And, but for the fact that three days later he was knifed and killed in a drunken brawl down in the East End, he might have figured more than he did in my story. But, since there were no papers on him, and nothing by which he could be identified, it occurred to the Colonel that he might profitably be kept alive to write threatening letters to Sir Rube. Another red herring, and a useful one: as I said, most people thought he was the thief."

"It's lucky for the thieves," I said, "that Sir Rube didn't handle the diamond when he gave it to Lady Shotover."

He drained his glass and stood up. "Yes," he agreed, "but it would have made no difference. The weights of the real and the paste stones were identical, and it was extremely improbable that he would examine it when he took it out. Anyway, that was a risk they had to run." He lit a cigarette. "Well, I must be getting along. A charming woman is getting up charades in aid of the local cats' home, and I'm performing."

"Really?" I said. "What part are you taking?"

A faint smile flickered round his lips, as he opened the door.
"That of a retired English colonel," he murmured.

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15: Dog's Tale

Mark Twain

Samuel Langhorne Clemens, 1835-1910

Harper's Magazine, Dec 1903

MY FATHER was a St. Bernard, my mother was a collie, but I am a Presbyterian. This is what my mother told me, I do not know these nice distinctions myself. To me they are only fine large words meaning nothing. My mother had a fondness for such; she liked to say them, and see other dogs look surprised and envious, as wondering how she got so much education. But, indeed, it was not real education; it was only show: she got the words by listening in the dining-room and drawing-room when there was company, and by going with the children to Sunday-school and listening there; and whenever she heard a large word she said it over to herself many times, and so was able to keep it until there was a dogmatic gathering in the neighborhood, then she would get it off, and surprise and distress them all, from pocket-pup to mastiff, which rewarded her for all her trouble. If there was a stranger he was nearly sure to be suspicious, and when he got his breath again he would ask her what it meant. And she always told him. He was never expecting this but thought he would catch her; so when she told him, he was the one that looked ashamed, whereas he had thought it was going to be she. The others were always waiting for this, and glad of it and proud of her, for they knew what was going to happen, because they had had experience. When she told the meaning of a big word they were all so taken up with admiration that it never occurred to any dog to doubt if it was the right one; and that was natural, because, for one thing, she answered up so promptly that it seemed like a dictionary speaking, and for another thing, where could they find out whether it was right or not? for she was the only cultivated dog there was. By and by, when I was older, she brought home the word Unintellectual, one time, and worked it pretty hard all the week at different gatherings, making much unhappiness and despondency; and it was at this time that I noticed that during that week she was asked for the meaning at eight different assemblages, and flashed out a fresh definition every time, which showed me that she had more presence of mind than culture, though I said nothing, of course. She had one word which she always kept on hand, and ready, like a life-preserver, a kind of emergency word to strap on when she was likely to get washed overboard in a sudden way— that was the word Synonymous. When she happened to fetch out a long word which had had its day weeks before and its prepared meanings gone to her dump-pile, if there was a stranger there of course it knocked him groggy for a couple of minutes, then he would come to, and by that time she would be away down wind on another tack, and not expecting anything; so when he'd hail and ask her to cash in, I (the

only dog on the inside of her game) could see her canvas flicker a moment— but only just a moment— then it would belly out taut and full, and she would say, as calm as a summer's day, "It's synonymous with supererogation," or some godless long reptile of a word like that, and go placidly about and skim away on the next tack, perfectly comfortable, you know, and leave that stranger looking profane and embarrassed, and the initiated slatting the floor with their tails in unison and their faces transfigured with a holy joy.

And it was the same with phrases. She would drag home a whole phrase, if it had a grand sound, and play it six nights and two matinees, and explain it a new way every time— which she had to, for all she cared for was the phrase; she wasn't interested in what it meant, and knew those dogs hadn't wit enough to catch her, anyway. Yes, she was a daisy! She got so she wasn't afraid of anything, she had such confidence in the ignorance of those creatures. She even brought anecdotes that she had heard the family and the dinner-guests laugh and shout over; and as a rule she got the nub of one chestnut hitched onto another chestnut, where, of course, it didn't fit and hadn't any point; and when she delivered the nub she fell over and rolled on the floor and laughed and barked in the most insane way, while I could see that she was wondering to herself why it didn't seem as funny as it did when she first heard it. But no harm was done; the others rolled and barked too, privately ashamed of themselves for not seeing the point, and never suspecting that the fault was not with them and there wasn't any to see.

You can see by these things that she was of a rather vain and frivolous character; still, she had virtues, and enough to make up, I think. She had a kind heart and gentle ways, and never harbored resentments for injuries done her, but put them easily out of her mind and forgot them; and she taught her children her kindly way, and from her we learned also to be brave and prompt in time of danger, and not to run away, but face the peril that threatened friend or stranger, and help him the best we could without stopping to think what the cost might be to us. And she taught us not by words only, but by example, and that is the best way and the surest and the most lasting. Why, the brave things she did, the splendid things! she was just a soldier; and so modest about it— well, you couldn't help admiring her, and you couldn't help imitating her; not even a King Charles spaniel could remain entirely despicable in her society. So, as you see, there was more to her than her education.

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WHEN I was well grown, at last, I was sold and taken away, and I never saw her again. She was broken-hearted, and so was I, and we cried; but she comforted me as well as she could, and said we were sent into this world for a

wise and good purpose, and must do our duties without repining, take our life as we might find it, live it for the best good of others, and never mind about the results; they were not our affair. She said men who did like this would have a noble and beautiful reward by and by in another world, and although we animals would not go there, to do well and right without reward would give to our brief lives a worthiness and dignity which in itself would be a reward. She had gathered these things from time to time when she had gone to the Sunday-school with the children, and had laid them up in her memory more carefully than she had done with those other words and phrases; and she had studied them deeply, for her good and ours. One may see by this that she had a wise and thoughtful head, for all there was so much lightness and vanity in it.

So we said our farewells, and looked our last upon each other through our tears; and the last thing she said— keeping it for the last to make me remember it the better, I think— was, "In memory of me, when there is a time of danger to another do not think of yourself, think of your mother, and do as she would do."

Do you think I could forget that? No.

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IT WAS such a charming home!— my new one; a fine great house, with pictures, and delicate decorations, and rich furniture, and no gloom anywhere, but all the wilderness of dainty colors lit up with flooding sunshine; and the spacious grounds around it, and the great garden— oh, greensward, and noble trees, and flowers, no end! And I was the same as a member of the family; and they loved me, and petted me, and did not give me a new name, but called me by my old one that was dear to me because my mother had given it me— Aileen Mavoureen. She got it out of a song; and the Grays knew that song, and said it was a beautiful name.

Mrs. Gray was thirty, and so sweet and so lovely, you cannot imagine it; and Sadie was ten, and just like her mother, just a darling slender little copy of her, with auburn tails down her back, and short frocks; and the baby was a year old, and plump and dimpled, and fond of me, and never could get enough of hauling on my tail, and hugging me, and laughing out its innocent happiness; and Mr. Gray was thirty-eight, and tall and slender and handsome, a little bald in front, alert, quick in his movements, business-like, prompt, decided, unsentimental, and with that kind of trim-chiseled face that just seems to glint and sparkle with frosty intellectuality! He was a renowned scientist. I do not know what the word means, but my mother would know how to use it and get effects. She would know how to depress a rat-terrier with it and make a lap-dog look sorry he came. But that is not the best one; the best one was Laboratory. My mother could organize a Trust on that one that would skin the tax-collars off the whole

herd. The laboratory was not a book, or a picture, or a place to wash your hands in, as the college president's dog said— no, that is the lavatory; the laboratory is quite different, and is filled with jars, and bottles, and electrics, and wires, and strange machines; and every week other scientists came there and sat in the place, and used the machines, and discussed, and made what they called experiments and discoveries; and often I came, too, and stood around and listened, and tried to learn, for the sake of my mother, and in loving memory of her, although it was a pain to me, as realizing what she was losing out of her life and I gaining nothing at all; for try as I might, I was never able to make anything out of it at all.

Other times I lay on the floor in the mistress's work-room and slept, she gently using me for a foot-stool, knowing it pleased me, for it was a caress; other times I spent an hour in the nursery, and got well tousled and made happy; other times I watched by the crib there, when the baby was asleep and the nurse out for a few minutes on the baby's affairs; other times I romped and raced through the grounds and the garden with Sadie till we were tired out, then slumbered on the grass in the shade of a tree while she read her book; other times I went visiting among the neighbor dogs— for there were some most pleasant ones not far away, and one very handsome and courteous and graceful one, a curly-haired Irish setter by the name of Robin Adair, who was a Presbyterian like me, and belonged to the Scotch minister.

The servants in our house were all kind to me and were fond of me, and so, as you see, mine was a pleasant life. There could not be a happier dog that I was, nor a gratefuler one. I will say this for myself, for it is only the truth: I tried in all ways to do well and right, and honor my mother's memory and her teachings, and earn the happiness that had come to me, as best I could.

By and by came my little puppy, and then my cup was full, my happiness was perfect. It was the dearest little waddling thing, and so smooth and soft and velvety, and had such cunning little awkward paws, and such affectionate eyes, and such a sweet and innocent face; and it made me so proud to see how the children and their mother adored it, and fondled it, and exclaimed over every little wonderful thing it did. It did seem to me that life was just too lovely to—

Then came the winter. One day I was standing a watch in the nursery. That is to say, I was asleep on the bed. The baby was asleep in the crib, which was alongside the bed, on the side next the fireplace. It was the kind of crib that has a lofty tent over it made of gauzy stuff that you can see through. The nurse was out, and we two sleepers were alone. A spark from the wood-fire was shot out, and it lit on the slope of the tent. I suppose a quiet interval followed, then a scream from the baby awoke me, and there was that tent flaming up toward the ceiling! Before I could think, I sprang to the floor in my fright, and in a second was half-way to the door; but in the next half-second my mother's farewell was

sounding in my ears, and I was back on the bed again. I reached my head through the flames and dragged the baby out by the waist-band, and tugged it along, and we fell to the floor together in a cloud of smoke; I snatched a new hold, and dragged the screaming little creature along and out at the door and around the bend of the hall, and was still tugging away, all excited and happy and proud, when the master's voice shouted:

"Begone you cursed beast!" and I jumped to save myself; but he was furiously quick, and chased me up, striking furiously at me with his cane, I dodging this way and that, in terror, and at last a strong blow fell upon my left foreleg, which made me shriek and fall, for the moment, helpless; the cane went up for another blow, but never descended, for the nurse's voice rang wildly out, "The nursery's on fire!" and the master rushed away in that direction, and my other bones were saved.

The pain was cruel, but, no matter, I must not lose any time; he might come back at any moment; so I limped on three legs to the other end of the hall, where there was a dark little stairway leading up into a garret where old boxes and such things were kept, as I had heard say, and where people seldom went. I managed to climb up there, then I searched my way through the dark among the piles of things, and hid in the secretest place I could find. It was foolish to be afraid there, yet still I was; so afraid that I held in and hardly even whimpered, though it would have been such a comfort to whimper, because that eases the pain, you know. But I could lick my leg, and that did some good.

For half an hour there was a commotion downstairs, and shoutings, and rushing footsteps, and then there was quiet again. Quiet for some minutes, and that was grateful to my spirit, for then my fears began to go down; and fears are worse than pains— oh, much worse. Then came a sound that froze me. They were calling me— calling me by name— hunting for me!

It was muffled by distance, but that could not take the terror out of it, and it was the most dreadful sound to me that I had ever heard. It went all about, everywhere, down there: along the halls, through all the rooms, in both stories, and in the basement and the cellar; then outside, and farther and farther away— then back, and all about the house again, and I thought it would never, never stop. But at last it did, hours and hours after the vague twilight of the garret had long ago been blotted out by black darkness.

Then in that blessed stillness my terrors fell little by little away, and I was at peace and slept. It was a good rest I had, but I woke before the twilight had come again. I was feeling fairly comfortable, and I could think out a plan now. I made a very good one; which was, to creep down, all the way down the back stairs, and hide behind the cellar door, and slip out and escape when the iceman came at dawn, while he was inside filling the refrigerator; then I would hide all day, and start on my journey when night came; my journey to—well, anywhere

where they would not know me and betray me to the master. I was feeling almost cheerful now; then suddenly I thought: Why, what would life be without my puppy!

That was despair. There was no plan for me; I saw that; I must say where I was; stay, and wait, and take what might come— it was not my affair; that was what life is— my mother had said it. Then— well, then the calling began again! All my sorrows came back. I said to myself, the master will never forgive. I did not know what I had done to make him so bitter and so unforgiving, yet I judged it was something a dog could not understand, but which was clear to a man and dreadful.

They called and called— days and nights, it seemed to me. So long that the hunger and thirst near drove me mad, and I recognized that I was getting very weak. When you are this way you sleep a great deal, and I did. Once I woke in an awful fright— it seemed to me that the calling was right there in the garret! And so it was: it was Sadie's voice, and she was crying; my name was falling from her lips all broken, poor thing, and I could not believe my ears for the joy of it when I heard her say:

"Come back to us— oh, come back to us, and forgive— it is all so sad without our—"

I broke in with *such* a grateful little yelp, and the next moment Sadie was plunging and stumbling through the darkness and the lumber and shouting for the family to hear, "She's found, she's found!"

The days that followed— well, they were wonderful. The mother and Sadie and the servants— why, they just seemed to worship me. They couldn't seem to make me a bed that was fine enough; and as for food, they couldn't be satisfied with anything but game and delicacies that were out of season; and every day the friends and neighbors flocked in to hear about my heroism— that was the name they called it by, and it means agriculture. I remember my mother pulling it on a kennel once, and explaining it in that way, but didn't say what agriculture was, except that it was synonymous with intramural incandescence; and a dozen times a day Mrs. Gray and Sadie would tell the tale to new-comers, and say I risked my life to save the baby's, and both of us had burns to prove it, and then the company would pass me around and pet me and exclaim about me, and you could see the pride in the eyes of Sadie and her mother; and when the people wanted to know what made me limp, they looked ashamed and changed the subject, and sometimes when people hunted them this way and that way with questions about it, it looked to me as if they were going to cry.

And this was not all the glory; no, the master's friends came, a whole twenty of the most distinguished people, and had me in the laboratory, and discussed me as if I was a kind of discovery; and some of them said it was wonderful in a dumb beast, the finest exhibition of instinct they could call to mind; but the

master said, with vehemence, "It's far above instinct; it's *reason*, and many a man, privileged to be saved and go with you and me to a better world by right of its possession, has less of it that this poor silly quadruped that's foreordained to perish"; and then he laughed, and said: "Why, look at me— I'm a sarcasm! bless you, with all my grand intelligence, the only thing I inferred was that the dog had gone mad and was destroying the child, whereas but for the beast's intelligence— it's *reason*, I tell you!— the child would have perished!"

They disputed and disputed, and *I* was the very center of subject of it all, and I wished my mother could know that this grand honor had come to me; it would have made her proud.

Then they discussed optics, as they called it, and whether a certain injury to the brain would produce blindness or not, but they could not agree about it, and said they must test it by experiment by and by; and next they discussed plants, and that interested me, because in the summer Sadie and I had planted seeds— I helped her dig the holes, you know— and after days and days a little shrub or a flower came up there, and it was a wonder how that could happen; but it did, and I wished I could talk— I would have told those people about it and shown then how much I knew, and been all alive with the subject; but I didn't care for the optics; it was dull, and when they came back to it again it bored me, and I went to sleep.

Pretty soon it was spring, and sunny and pleasant and lovely, and the sweet mother and the children patted me and the puppy good-by, and went away on a journey and a visit to their kin, and the master wasn't any company for us, but we played together and had good times, and the servants were kind and friendly, so we got along quite happily and counted the days and waited for the family.

And one day those men came again, and said, now for the test, and they took the puppy to the laboratory, and I limped three-leggedly along, too, feeling proud, for any attention shown to the puppy was a pleasure to me, of course. They discussed and experimented, and then suddenly the puppy shrieked, and they set him on the floor, and he went staggering around, with his head all bloody, and the master clapped his hands and shouted:

"There, I've won— confess it! He's a blind as a bat!"

And they all said:

"It's so— you've proved your theory, and suffering humanity owes you a great debt from henceforth," and they crowded around him, and wrung his hand cordially and thankfully, and praised him.

But I hardly saw or heard these things, for I ran at once to my little darling, and snuggled close to it where it lay, and licked the blood, and it put its head against mine, whimpering softly, and I knew in my heart it was a comfort to it in its pain and trouble to feel its mother's touch, though it could not see me. Then

it dropped down, presently, and its little velvet nose rested upon the floor, and it was still, and did not move any more.

Soon the master stopped discussing a moment, and rang in the footman, and said, "Bury it in the far corner of the garden," and then went on with the discussion, and I trotted after the footman, very happy and grateful, for I knew the puppy was out of its pain now, because it was asleep. We went far down the garden to the farthest end, where the children and the nurse and the puppy and I used to play in the summer in the shade of a great elm, and there the footman dug a hole, and I saw he was going to plant the puppy, and I was glad, because it would grow and come up a fine handsome dog, like Robin Adair, and be a beautiful surprise for the family when they came home; so I tried to help him dig, but my lame leg was no good, being stiff, you know, and you have to have two, or it is no use. When the footman had finished and covered little Robin up, he patted my head, and there were tears in his eyes, and he said: "Poor little doggie, you saved *his* child!"

I have watched two whole weeks, and he doesn't come up! This last week a fright has been stealing upon me. I think there is something terrible about this. I do not know what it is, but the fear makes me sick, and I cannot eat, though the servants bring me the best of food; and they pet me so, and even come in the night, and cry, and say, "Poor doggie— do give it up and come home; *don't* break our hearts!" and all this terrifies me the more, and makes me sure something has happened. And I am so weak; since yesterday I cannot stand on my feet anymore. And within this hour the servants, looking toward the sun where it was sinking out of sight and the night chill coming on, said things I could not understand, but they carried something cold to my heart.

"Those poor creatures! They do not suspect. They will come home in the morning, and eagerly ask for the little doggie that did the brave deed, and who of us will be strong enough to say the truth to them: 'The humble little friend is gone where go the beasts that perish.' "

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16: Mrs. Steel's Jewellery

Almost a Detective Story

Ward Edson

Edward Dyson, 1865-1931

Punch (Melbourne) 25 May 1905

JEWEL MYSTERIES, common as they are in the English magazines (which implies, I suppose, that they are common, too, in everyday life in the Old World), are certainly rare in the Australian bush. In fact, the case of Mrs. Steel's rubies is the only jewel mystery that I have met with in the Antipodean back blocks.

Mrs. Steel was a young woman; Mr. Steel was not a young man. Mr. Steel was a very wealthy man, and the proprietor of one of the best-stocked runs in the state. He was an elderly, quiet, methodical man, soft of speech and gentle of manner, neat in his dress, and extremely unlike the squatter familiar to the readers of Australian fiction.

Josiah Steel married his housekeeper. It was not nearly as astonishing a happening as his friends seemed to think. Really, if Steel was to marry at all, it was clear that he would marry his housekeeper, since he saw little of any other woman.

The new Mrs. Steel was not a lady, of course, but, then, Josiah himself was not altogether a gentleman, despite the gravity of his manner, the softness of his speech, and the neatness of his dress. His grammar, for instance, was not perfect, he was not what you would call an authority on table manners, and his birth was very humble. Josiah was entirely a self-made man, and self-made men rarely make so good a job of it.

Mrs. Steel came to Waratah on the recommendation of a Melbourne registry office keeper, who guaranteed that the young woman was sober, industrious and competent.

The new housekeeper proved to be all that, and more. She was cheerful, she was assiduous in promoting Mr. Steel's comfort, she managed his house admirably, instituted a new order, made the rooms bright and pretty, and made Josiah happier in his own house than he had ever been in his life before. It seemed to him that she had let sunshine into the homestead.

Clearly since Stella possessed the faculty of making his life happier, it would have been sheer folly on Steel's part to risk the chance of losing her. To avoid that painful possibility the squatter married his housekeeper, and did not, as sometimes happen, spoil a good housekeeper to make an indifferent wife. Stella was fond of society. She gave the people about the opportunity of coming to Waratah and being excellently entertained there, and naturally their prejudices succumbed.

Josiah grew more and more in love with his young wife. She was not handsome, but she had a good figure, beautiful hair and eyes, and a nice disposition. Mrs. Steel's feelings towards her husband implied the existence of an easy friendship between them.

At least, she seemed grateful, and she had good reason to be grateful. Steel thought nothing too good for her. He had spent much of his life accumulating money, never knowing exactly what to do with it. Now it came in very useful as a means of gratifying his wife. He gave her anything she wished that money could buy.

The rubies were a gift to mark the first anniversary of their weddind day. They were said to be the finest in Australia. They were brought out from Europe on Steel's order, and cost a small fortune. A burglar proof safe was set up at the homestead in which to store them, and yet they were stolen. The stones had been in Mrs. Steel's possession four years when one morning she rushed to her husband white with terror, tremulous with agitation.

"The rubies, Jo," she said, "have vou got them ?"

"I?" cried Steel, starting up, "of course not. Why, what's the matter, my dear ?"

"They're gone— the rubies are stolen!"

Mrs. Steel sank upon a couch, buried her face in the cushions and sobbed aloud. Her whole figure shook, she was obviously in a condition of extreme nervous terror. Josiah seated himself on the edge of tne couch and put his arms about his wife.

"Hush, hush," he said, "do not give way. Try and tell me what has happened. Are you quite sure the jewels are stolen?"

It was some time before Stella recovered sufficiently to be explicit, and then she explained that she had gone to bed, leaving the key of the safe in a small drawer under the mirror, and on getting up in the morning found the safe door wide open, the kev in the lock, and the rubies and perhaps a thousand pounds' worth of other jewellery stolen.

The house was carefully searched, but nothing that would provide a clue was discovered, saving the fact that one of the front windows on the second floor of the house (Steel had recently built a new homestead) was unlatched, and the housemaid was quite positive she had latched it on going to bed.

The detective office in Melbourne was communicated with, and Detective Hay was sent to Waratah to take the case in hand. Hay was a tall, thin, waspish man, who was angry with everybody for everything that had been done.

"You were too hasty, madam," he told Sirs. Steel. "When you found that your jewels were gone you should have said nothing to anybody but your husband, until the detectives arrived. Somebody in the house is probably an accomplice."

"Surely you don't suspect any of our people."

"Madam, to a man in my profession all people are suspected."

"But I assure you the servants are all honest."

"Lots of people are honest who might suddenly get over it if a fortune in jewels were left lying to their hand."

Hay spent a few days prowling about the homestead and the district. He examined the ground under the unlatched window very carefully, and had all the people about the premises under close cross-examination at one time or another.

Then he arrested Peter Scard.

Peter Scard was arrested because he was the only vagabond available. He was a young man of about thirty-five, who was rather lazy, and only worked when urged by dire necessity. At other times he lived by sun-downing, cadging his tucker and sleeping in the shabby little tent in which his swag was wrapped.

In all this Scard was just like a good many more bush loafers, but he was unlike them in being evidently a man of some education and breeding. He laughed at Hay's charge.

"Guilty of stealing £20,000 worth of jewellery," he cried. "Great Scot! I wish I were."

Hay called upon Scard to prove where he was on the night of the robbery, and the man declared that he was in his tent a mile from Waratah. The detective could make nothing of him, and he was liberated.

After this the detective spent five weeks, on an apparently fruitless quest. The Steel rubies had absolutely disappeared; no trace of them had been discovered anywhere. The police had failed to track a single stone, and already Josiah was satisfied that the jewels were lost for good and all.

Then came the arrest of David Hardinge in Melbourne. This was a great surprise to all interested in the case, and a shock to Mr. and Mrs. Steel, whose guest Hardinge had been. Hardinge was a civil engineer, thirty, tall, handsome, and a great favourite. The news of his arrest caused Mrs. Steel great perturbation of spirit, and at the trial she showed much graver anxiety than the prisoner.

There were circumstances brought out in the evidence that made the case look rather grave against Hardinge. He was staying at the Black Boy Inn, near Waratah, at the time of the robbery, and it was proved that on the night of the crime he had left the hotel at about eleven o'clock, and returned again at one in the morning, looking pale and much upset. At breakfast it was noticed that he had a painful looking cut on his head, which he said was caused by a fall.

When called upon the accused admitted that the story about the injury was not true. He declared now that he was walking in the bush towards Waratah when he was stunned by a blow delivered by some man who came suddenly up

behind him. He did not recover for over an hour, and when he did his coat and hat were lying beside him. He believed he had been drugged after receiving the blow. Questioned as to the reason for telling a false story at the hotel, and his reason for being in the vicinity of Waratah at such an hour, he refused point blank to tell.

It was Mrs. Steel's evidence that cleared Hardinge. Stella swore positively that she had seen the jewels in the safe at half-past twelve on the night of the robbery. A verdict of not guilty followed, and Hardinge was liberated. Hay tried a little further, and then practically abandoned the case, and the robbery of the Steel rubies ceased to be a matter of public interest.

ONE NIGHT thirteen months after the perpetration of the theft, Josiah Steel was called upon by a tall, gentlemanly man, who said he wanted to talk on a matter of great importance. He was asked in, and presently found himself seated with the squatter in the latter's library and smoking-room.

"The matter I have to speak of concerns Mrs. Steel very nearly, and I should like to have her present," said the stranger.

"Certainly," answered the mystified squatter, and Mrs. Steel was sent for. The moment Stella entered the room she recognised the stranger.

"I know you," she said. "You are Peter Scard, the man who was arrested for stealing the rubies."

"Precisely," replied Scard coolly. "I hope you will listen to me, Mr. Steel. It is of the rubies I wish to speak."

"Then you were the thief," cried Steel, springing to his feet.

"No, sir," said Scard. "Please be seated, and please be calm. I am not the thief. In point of fact there was no thief."

"What are you saying?"

"The absolute truth. There was no thief. The jewels were given into the hands of a certain person, and for the sum of £5,000 will be restored minus about £200 worth. These I sold to keep me going."

"Then you are the thief? I'll have you arrested."

"No, sir, you will not. There was no thief, I tell you. If you do not believe me appeal to your wife!"

Stella, who up to now had been standing by the table, here sank into a chair. Her face was pale, her hands trembled.

"Appeal to me?" she faltered.

"Certainly, madam, for it was you who gave me the rubies. You handed them to me out of the left-hand front window, and I took them away, and hid them."

"Handed them to you!"

"To be sure. Shall I explain? Mr. Steel, it is not a pleasant story for you to hear, but it is necessary for me to go on if Mrs. Steel cannot persuade you to pay the five thousand without further parley."

"Tell what you know," said Stella doggedly.

"Very well. Sir, I had the good fortune to overhear your wife and Hardinge planning an elopement, one night in the orchard. I was hidden in some currant bushes, Mrs. Steel. They intended taking Mrs. Steel's jewellery with them to set up house in some distant country. Mrs. Steel was to hand the valuables out to Hardinge on a night, and at an hour fixed. My plan was instantly formed. I waylaid Hardinge on the appointed night, knocked him on the head, chloroformed him, took his hat and coat, and the jewels were handed out to me. They are now in my possession, and I have concluded that you will think it worth while— and £5,000— to have this most romantic episode kept dark, and your rubies restored."

Stella had thrown herself at her husband's feet, clinging to him, her face between his knees.

"It's true!" she cried, "it's true! I thought Hardinge had taken the jewels and forsaken me. I believed him guilty, although he swore to me afterwards that he was not. I was going to leave you. Send me away if you will, but I swear before God I have repented that folly— bitterly— bitterly— bitterly! I was, oh! so weary of living here in the bush. I wanted town life, and I had loved Hardinge before I knew you."

Josiah sat in his chair, very still and very pale. He was silent for several minutes, while his wife crouched sobbing at his feet.

"Bring the rubies here to-morrow night, and I will give you a cheque," he said suddenly in a calm voice. "I pay the money on one condition, that vou leave Australia and never return."

"That is my intention," said Scard.

The Steels removed to Melbourne shortly after the mysterious restoration of the rubies, and lived there till Josiah's death, which occurred some six years later, six happy, contented years it seemed to all those who were intimate enough to know.

17: A Voice From the Fog

Ben Ames Williams

1889-1953

All-Story Weekly , 15 Sep 1917

THE sun climbed above the pines that topped the rocky heights along the eastern shore of the lake, and the fish lost their appetite. But if they were no longer hungry, we were. William turned the boat toward camp, and we landed at the flat rock like a landing stage below our tent. I cradled a handful of birch bark and a few twigs into a crackling little blaze, and had a pot of coffee boiling by the time William had split four of our morning's catch of bass. Half-pounders they were, not trophies of which I should boast when I returned to civilization, but toothsome, nevertheless.

Spitted on green twigs, the fish turned from pink to white and then to golden brown as we broiled them in the flames. The coffee had a pinewoods aroma all its own, the bass were beyond compare, and only William's wife, Annie, could make such doughnuts as those he produced from the basket in the tent door.

When the last white bone was picked, we doused our fire with water splashed from the lake, lit each his pipe, and found a spot where a spreading hemlock let the climbing sun warm a flat rock just enough and not too much. It was lazy weather in late September, a sky without clouds, and a placid lake that rippled to the caress of each whisper of wind as a cat's fur ripple to the hand that strokes it. The morning mist had gone where good mists go, a suggestion of it yet remaining so that the lake seemed to steam lazily in the sun; and I said to Williams, lazily:

"I'm going to take a swim in an hour or so."

William puffed slowly at his pipe and for a time said nothing. "I used to be a right smart swimmer when I was a boy," he remarked at last, almost as though it were a confession. "Ain't cared much for swimming these last few years, though."

I was moved to an oration on the joys of swimming. I spoke at length and with feeling, though not too much feeling, for it was more pleasant not to exert one's self unduly.

"Greatest of sports," I orated. "Nothing like it. No sensation to equal floating along—"

"I cal'late that's right," William agreed with what was almost a hint of impatience in his voice. "But there's things that a man can't stand. I sort of got put out of the notion of swimming, here a while back."

I looked at William from the corner of an eye and saw a story in his face; and so I made myself as small and as quiet as possible and left William to address

himself to his bubbling pipe and to the dimpling lake and to the fair September morning. "Yes, sir," Williams repeated, "I 'uz a good swimmer. Never saw but one that could beat me at it. An' that 'uz a woman."

And so he began.

YOU KNOW (SAID WILLIAM) there used to be a summer camping ground up on Round Pond, ten-twelve miles no'theast of here. There was quite a bunch of folks that come there, reg'lar, every year. But they don't come no more. The lake don't look as purty to them now as it did then, mebbe. I used to own a farm up that way myself, but I sort of moved away after a spell and bought down here. It was Nick Radimon's drowning that seemed to set folks ag'in' the place, and L'ander Gipper's finish put the finish to the summer camping, too.

I c'n rec'l'ect the fust time I ever took p'tickler notice of this Nick Radimon. I used to be a kind of a handy man around the camp. The cottages and tents was set on a slope, 'mongst the pines, and I used some boating and take 'em fishing an' carry their truck in to the camp from th' railroad, no'th of there. So naturally I was down there right smart, an' this day I first took note of Nick Radimon was one day they was all in swimming.

It was right at the start of the season, and there was some of the new ones that I didn't know yet; but right away I spotted this woman by the raft. And, gentlemen, but she could swim. The rest of the crowd was watching her do stunts, and I didn't blame 'em a mite; she was wu'th watching. She was laughing, and they kept egging her on to do new tricks of one kind and another, and she'd do whatever they said.

I see her do two dives that was as smooth as the sun dipping behind the trees. She'd go down from the top of the raft ladder as straight and slim and soople as a piece of steel that's tempered just right. And the water, it seemed like it reached right up to meet her and just took her right down into like a lover takes his girl. And the little quiver of her as she slipped down out of sight was for all the world like the little way a girl seems to pretend to hold back when her boy holds out his arms to her.

They ain't many things any prettier than a pretty dive, now is there?

I was out on a rocky point to one side, a-watching her, and I forgot pretty near everything in just seeing this woman pufform. She was just a girl, you'd say at first— not over twenty, surely. And then the next minute you'd be sure she was a woman grown, and no girl at all. Then one of the men challenged her to a race, and they div' off the raft and started toward the point where I was. She struck right into the crawl, smooth as clockwork. Her arms 'ud come up— left one up a little, right a little higher, then right one high and left not quite so high— you know how I mean; and the stroke never lost one beat of time nor varied an inch in the reach and the drive of them. And she made the fellow

racing her look like he was standing still, so that he give up and laughed and turned back to the raft, and she stopped and went after him and beat him back to it.

After that, they all took to diving for white pebbles, and this woman beating them all. Once she stayed under water extra long, and I heard some one give a gasp right behind me, but shucks— I felt that same way myself, and I didn't even turn 'round to see who it was.

And then, a minute later, this girl-woman climbed the ladder on the raft and waved her hand to them all and div' off— and didn't come up.

When she'd been down thirty seconds, I began to watch for her purty close; and when I figured she'd been under close on a minute, I started to edge toward the water— not knowing what I'd do, but just to be on hand. And when she'd been down something over a minute, I heard the man behind me speak out. It sounded like the words was choked out of him, like you squeeze the seed out of a cherry, and I wheeled like a shot. "My God!" was all he said; and that ain't so awful much to say, maybe. But the way he said it and the look on his face told me he was scared to the edge of nothing.

A nice set-up man he was, with clean skin and a good, clear eye. He didn't see me looking at him, just stared past me at the water, leaning forward a bit. And then there come a little splash and a gasp behind me, and I turned and there was the woman just climbing out on the rocks at our feet. She'd swum all that way to the rocks from the raft under water. It must have been around five-six rods.

"Hello, Nick," she called to the man behind me. "I saw you and came over."

He was too paralyzed to reach out a hand to help her up the rock, but she didn't need help. She swung up them and took his hand, not seeming to notice the scared face of him.

I hadn't had a real good look at her before this, but she passed right by me now, and I see she surely was built pretty. She was breathing deep, and you could see her sides swell, clear down to the tip of her lungs, with each breath. No wonder, breathing like that, she could stay under as she liked. Straight she was, and when she walked there was a ripple to her from her throat to her toe. Through her wet bathing clothes you could see the swell of her chest, and the flexing of her thigh muscles as she climbed the rocks.

Most women you see in their bathing suits, there's some part of them— a skinniness or a fatness, or a flatness in the wrong place, that spoils the picture. But this woman, if you'd only seen a part of her as big as your hand, you'd have known every bit of her was perfect. Animals are that way. The average woods animal is finished smooth to the last knot-hole; but there ain't many humans that don't look better for keeping most of theirselves under cover.

This woman was as perfect as a doe, or a catamount. There was something about her, too, even that first day, that made me think of a catamount. She went along with this man that had been so scared, the one she'd called Nick, and I saw them go to their cabin up among the pines.

Folks told me about her, when I asked. The man was Nick Radimon, and she was Helen Radimon, his wife. Radimon and his partner, Leander Gipper, was at the camp that summer for the first time. There was an idea that Radimon had been a clerk or something and had married her and she had money. That's what folks said.

The thing they didn't tell me about Radimon, because they didn't know it, even if I had begun to figure it out for myself, was that he was scared of the water.

You never caught him in swimming; and if he went fishing, which he did, it was because his partner, this Gipper, pestered him into it. I've been out with them and I've seen Gipper tip the boat just to see Radimon shiver and grab the thwarts.

You'd think you wouldn't have no use for a man that was scared of water that way. But you couldn't help liking Radimon. I knew he wasn't a coward, for one thing, for I saw Gipper snag him in the thumb with a hook one day, and Radimon whipped out his knife and cut the thing out without a whimper. He was a friendly sort of a man, and he wasn't afraid of his share of the work that went with good times. He was just folks, like the rest of us; not the kind that slaps you on the back every little while, like Gipper—but you liked him just the same.

Now, you take Gipper, and it was different, and that was a right funny thing, too. I always figured L'ander Gipper was like an egg that's been kept just a day too long. If he wasn't addled, there was a musty streak in him somewhere. He was always smiling, for one thing; and if there's anything sorrowfuller than a man that never smiles, it's a man that's always smiling. Gipper's smile wasn't right pleasant, anyhow. It looked to me like his collar was choking him. His eyes stuck out a little, too; and there was something about him I couldn't put a name to, that made me fidget like a nervous girl.

They was a funny pair of partners, and I studied 'em, right smart, and Mrs. Radimon, too. There was a woman; and as wrapped up in Nick Radimon as a hen with one chick. His being scared of water, and her loving it so, naturally worried her, and she used to try to get him to learn to swim, but there wasn't a chance. Her and me, got right friendly after a spell, and she'd talk to me about Nick in a way to make you cry.

It always struck me as sort of pitiful, someway, the way things as fine as women themselves all tied up with us men, but I reckon they're built so they can't help it. Helen Radimon was more that way than most, too. She was a

mother, and a wife, and a sister, and a chum, and a lot of other things to Radimon, all at once.

She told me one day that his being scared of the water come from his father being drowned, and his mother always warning him of the water when he was a baby and a kid.

I'd always figured Gipper and Radimon would have a blow up as partners, some day; and it come late that summer in the camp. The inside of it I never knew, but I know I driv' a man in from the railroad to see them, and I left them together on a rock below the cabins, and I come past a little later and they were at it. Both of them were mad, and Gipper's eyes was as hateful as a snake's. I heard Radimon say:

"Well, pay this man's bill— pay him what's due him, or I'll show you up before the whole city."

I went on past; and after a bit I saw the stranger head back for the railroad in one of the other teams, and he looked to be satisfied.

The next afternoon it was that I took Gipper and Radimon out trolling. They seemed to have patched things up a bit, but I noticed Gipper was studying Radimon, like he was picking out a place to hit. We got back to camp and Mrs. Radimon was waiting for us at the slip, all cool and purty in some white dress she'd put on for the evening. We come alongside the slip, and I got out and held the boat while Gipper stepped up beside me. Radimon was half standing up in the boat; and Gipper, in stepping out, happened to give the thwart a kick and the boat tipped.

Well, Radimon went all to pieces. He dropped flat in the boat and hugged on to a seat and his face was gray with fright. There wasn't three feet of water under him, either. Maybe it was funny, though it didn't strike me so. Gipper laughed till he cried.

"By the Lord, Nick," he yelled, "I'm going to make you learn to swim yet. I'm going to take you out in the canoe some day and tip you over. You'll swim then, I'll bet a fortune."

At that, things got almighty quiet of a sudden. Radimon climbed out on the slip moving careful; and I saw Mrs. Radimon had her eye on Gipper. I wouldn't have liked it much, to have her look at me like that. I looked his way to see how he took it.

Gipper wasn't noticing. He looked like a man that had just heard a hail, off in the woods somewhere; or like a fellow that had just remembered something important. And I saw his eyes flash toward Radimon, and there was something in them raging like a trapped snake that twists and squirms and strikes at everything in reach. And then Radimon and his wife went to their cabin, and Gipper went off along the rocks by himself.

The next day it was that Radimon got drowned. Him and Gipper had planned to go fishing at dawn, and me being up early like I always am, I was down t' the slip when they put out. Misty it was, like it most always is in the morning on Maine lakes. They come down to the slip together, and Radimon started to put their truck into a boat, but Gipper stopped him.

"Put the truck in a canoe," he cried. "I'm not going to go rattling those oars all over the lake, scaring the bass to death."

Radimon started to argue it, then changed his mind. He hated like time to admit how he felt about the water, and hid it all he could, and Gipper could fairly raise welts on him with his jeers. Radimon had on a gray flannel shirt, I rec'llect, and he had a white handkerchief tied around his head. He'd had a headache when he started out, Mrs. Radimon told me after. I offered to go along with 'em and handle the canoe, but Gipper put me down.

"Damn it, don't butt in," he says.

So they paddled away, Gipper in the stern, and was lost in the fog before they'd passed the swimming raft off the slip. I didn't see Radimon again till I dragged up his body two days later.

I was still down t' the slip when Gipper come back, alone, and I knew without his telling me, what had happened. He was wet, he'd been in the lake, and there was some water in the canoe. You know how a canoe will do, that way— tip a man out and scarcely wet its own bottom at all. I ran to help Gipper pull the canoe up, and I says:

"Where's Mr. Radimon?"

"We upset," he says. "He tried to turn around on his seat and tipped us both out. He went down like a rock. He's drowned."

I couldn't say anything, but just looked at him. He looked like a pale frog that had just had an awful scare. Yes, sir, that's just what he looked like. It made me feel a mite sick to look at him. He was a good swimmer, but I figured he'd been too scared to dive for Radimon. He went to his cabin, and I was just about to go away, knowing some one would have to tell Mrs. Radimon, and not wanting to be the man, when I heard Rimbel's canoe coming.

Shucks, now, I ain't told you about Rimbel, have I? I always do get things mixed up when I try to tell a straight story. Listen then.

This Eugene Rimbel was one of the men in the camp; an oldish man, and a kind of an invalid, and a chap that liked to stay by himself and to paddle around the lake in his own canoe, alone, and so on. He'd told me his heart was bad, and he was taking things easy for fear of a shock of some kind.

Well, I heard this other canoe coming, and I see it was Rimbel's, and him in it. And then I forgot all about Radimon, for I see Rimbel needed help more and quicker. He couldn't hardly paddle. He was weaving in his seat, and zigzagging toward the slip, and his face was all torn and drawn into wrinkles like some one

had gone over it with a rake. His eyes were popping, and the worst of it was, he was laughing. I hate to hear a man laugh like that.

I give a hail, and Bill Waitt and Guy Falkley, that worked around the camp like me, come running down to the water as Rimbel's canoe beached. He tried to step out, and his knees buckled, and he dropped on his face in the shallow short water. We carried him to his tent and, while the rest of the camp was thinking and talking about the news Gipper had brought, we worked to revive Rimbel.

He did come 'round at last, enough to tell us what had happened. He said he'd heard Radimon drown. "Heard" was the word he used.

He said he'd paddled out to the Ledge, twothree miles from camp and near the wild shore across the lake, and had just started to fish a little when he heard another canoe, off in the fog. You know how sound carries that way. He couldn't tell how far off this other canoe was, but he said he heard voices and talking, and then he heard a sudden clatter and a voice that he recognized as Radimon's yelled:

"Gipper— for God's sake— look out! You'll tip us over!"

There wasn't no answer to that, Rimbel said, but just another kind of a choky yell, and a splash, and the scrape of a paddle falling over a canoe thwart—and he knew they'd upset.

Rimbel was a sick little cuss, and he never thought to go to help them—just sat and listened. His story isn't easy to get, for he was fighting us and trying to get out of bed, but he did say he heard Radimon yell:

"Hold the canoe— for God's sake— so I can keep up."

Then, he said, there came a sort of a gurgle— Rimbel said that gurgling was the worst— and then Radimon again:

"Help— Gipper!"

And then nothing more for a while— and then the noise of a man swimming, and a paddle rattling in a canoe, and after a bit the noise of a man paddling away. And Rimbel said he started back for camp and that was about all he could tell us.

Falkley had gone for a doctor first off, but Dr. Hughes, the only one in camp, was out with the others hunting for Radimon and before Falkley could paddle across the lake and get him, Rimbel up and died. Heart cracked on him, the doctor said.

They told me the first thing Mrs. Radimon said when she heard was:

"Leander Gipper killed him."

Me— I didn't hardly think she was right, spite of what Rimbel had said. Rimbel was a sick man, half dead, and he'd heard them tip over and heard

Radimon drown, and that was bad enough to upset any man so he wouldn't be too sure of what Radimon had yelled. He'd rambled all over the lot, in telling it to us, and it wasn't even as straight out as I've given it to you.

Dike Bransford, the district attorney, came up to camp to see about it, and talked to me, and I told him what Rimbel had said. He felt like I did, that you couldn't count on a sick man hearing straight, on a thing like that. And he said you couldn't get that story before a jury anyhow. We got Radimon's body, and there isn't a mark on it. So though there was some talk about Gipper doing it, he wasn't even arrested, and the whole thing seemed to just drop.

Mrs. Radimon took Nick Radimon's body and the clothes he had worn that last day and went home. Guy Falkley driv' her to the railroad. She said good-by to me at the camp, and just as she was getting into Guy's wagon, Gipper came up and said something and put out his hand.

She didn't speak to him, but just looked in his eyes and then down at his hand, and he jerked it back like she had stuck a knife into it. And then she drove away. Looking after her, and at Gipper, I says to myself:

"Bill Plaice," I says, "there'll be another chapter to this story yet."

And there was, stranger than the first, and it was this that stopped the campers coming to the lake.

IT WAS the next summer. The crowd didn't begin to come to the camp, take it as a usual thing, till along in June. Jim Waitt owned the place, and he'd made a good thing out of it for several seasons. He'd built a big dining-hall, and a sort of a lodge where folks could get together on rainy days, besides the cabins, tents scattered through the trees. The next summer after Radimon was drowned, along the middle of May, Jim sent for me.

"Bill," he says, "I want you to start in early this season. That man Gipper is sick, or something, and he wants to come here early. I've agreed, and I want you to take care of him. The cook won't be here till the first of June, so you'll have to cook for him, and take him around."

"I didn't figure he'd come here again," I says.

"Tell you straight, I'd as soon he didn't," says Jim. "But I don't like to refuse him."

So I 'greed to take charge of L'ander Gipper, and when he came I met him at the station and carried him over my team. I saw right away that he was a medium sick man, like Jim had said. He looked right poorly.

It's a funny thing, but folks seem to like to tell me their troubles. I bet I've heard more secrets than a doctor, and so I wasn't what you'd call surprised when Gipper got confidential, first time we went out after bass. When we started, I'd headed the boat up the lake, but he says:

"No, let's go across to the ledge."

So I done like he said. I'd only figured he wouldn't want to fish where Radimon had been drowned. That was at the Ledge, and there was just as good fishing up the lake. What we called the ledge was a place where the big rocks on the bottom of the lake was piled up to within ten or fifteen feet of the surface, and with sand from them to the nearest— a great place for fish.

It was Gipper that started the conversation, after we'd fished a while with nothing doing. "I s'pose you're surprised I come back this year," he says.

"Not in p'tickler," I tells him. "This is a right nice place to come to."

"But after last year—" He begins and I cut in on him.

"Accidents c'n happen anywheres," I says.

He thought that over for a while before he said anything more. "I didn't intend to come," he says at last, and then he let go of himself a little.

"I didn't want ever to see the place again," he says in a hoarse kind of a way. "But I won't be scared out," he says.

That didn't seem to call for me to say anything, so I didn't say it.

"I won't be scared," he says again. "Nobody— nothing can scare me away!"

And then he whisked around to look over his shoulder as if he expected some one to hit him.

"Why should you be scared?" I says, just to be talking; and at that he whips out a letter and hands it to me.

"Look at that," he tells me.

It wasn't rightly a letter. You've seen these calendar pads, with a date at the top, and a place to write below. It was a sheet torn off one of them and it says:

"I'll expect you at the Ledge this summer."

And it was just signed "Nick."

"Nick?" I says, feeling the flesh on my cheeks crawl a little. "Who's that?"

He leaned toward me. "Radimon," he says.

"He used to leave notes like that on my desk when we were to meet anywhere and he had missed me. That is his writing, I'll swear it."

"But— where'd this come from?" I says.

He looked around as though afraid someone might hear.

"There's been one like that on my desk every Tuesday morning this winter," he told me.

"Always the same words, always in Radimon's hand, always on Tuesday morning. And I've had detectives, and yet never succeeded in finding how the thing gets there. Always on Tuesday morning, man. Don't you understand?"

It was a Tuesday morning when Radimon was drowned. I gave Gipper back his note. I was glad to.

WELL, things went along, and the other campers begun to get there, and nothing happened, and Gipper chirked up some. I got him off my hands, me

having other jobs to attend to. He didn't make friends much, but he'd go off fishing by himself all morning, round the lake, and in the evenin' he'd be out again.

He went out one morning so, in the mist 'bout sunup; and it was a Tuesday. I seen him go, but I didn't think nothin' of it. I wuz workin' around the camp, like I always wuz; and in about an hour I heard some one comin' like mad across the lake; and they weren't paddling quiet or careful, neither.

So I watched, and it wuz Gipper; and he'd had an awful scare. I helped him to land, and I had to all but carry him to his tent. He wouldn't tell me a word; but he stayed in his tent all that day, and when I tried to take him some dinner he raved at me and told me to git away. Which I did. I wondered some about that; but I set it down to nerves or somethin', for Gipper had come to camp in a bad way, and I reckoned he weren't cured yet.

But a week after that he come to me, and he says:

"Will you take me trollin' to-morrow mornin', Bill?" he says.

I figured. "To-morrow's Tuesday, ain't it? Sure— I ain't got any date for to-morrow. Start early?"

He nodded; didn't say a word; just went on to his tent. And 'twa'n't till 'twas too late that I remembered that Tuesday was a sort of Jonah day for him. I could have backed out then, and I would've, if there'd been anything to back out for. But there wasn't no excuse I could make, so I let things go along.

So we met down t' the shore next morning when it wuz just comin' light; and he stowed his stuff in the stern o' the boat, and I took the oars; and I asked him:

"Whur'll we go?"

"The Ledge," he says. "Row back and forth across the Ledge." And I see then that his face was white, and he was gritting his teeth to keep them from chattering.

"Cold?" I says.

"No," he snaps at me. "Don't bother about me, Bill. There's a— a fish over t' the Ledge I'm going to get— or it 'll get me."

So we rowed over, and rowed back and forth, and back and forth, in and out, part o' the time not a hundred yards f'om shore; part o' the time further out. Me, rowing, had my back to the front; and Gipper was trolling over the stern; but he didn't seem to put his mind to it. He missed two or three good strikes by jerkin' too soon.

Finally I says to him:

"Watch your line closer, and you'll have better luck."

He started to say somethin', and changed his mind; and fer a spell he kept his eyes on his line. Then he got to looking around the boat, and ahead again. And then, all of a sudden, the hair stood up on the back of my head, for I saw Gipper turn a sickly white.

"Listen!" he whispers in a sort of a choky voice. "Hear that?"

I listened, and what with the chucklin' of the little waves and all, it was easy to think I heard somethin', but the next minute I knew there wa'n't nothing to hear.

"Hear what?" I asks him, looking all around. I'd stopped rowing. There was mist on the water, and we couldn't see much. But I knew where we wuz— on the inside of the Ledge, not fur offshore.

He didn't say anythin' more, and I looked at him. Then I see his lips was moving fast, like he was trying to tell me something. He was looking past me, acrost the water, and his mouth going that-away, then, all of a sudden, he yells:

"For God's sake! Did you hear that, man? Choking— splashing—"

He mouthed something I couldn't hear, then:

"Row— pull ahead," he yelled, and pointed over my shoulder.

I looked that way. There was something— just a flash of white, and something gray, lifting, off in the mist— maybe it was a touch o' white foam on a lifting little wave.

But when Radimon wuz drowned, you rec'lect, he had a white handkerchief round his head and he was wearing a gray flannel shirt.

I wuz paralyzed for a spell; and then Gipper let out a scream. "Hear that?" he yells. "Hear him— calling— 'Help— Gipper!'"

I lunged on my oars, and I swung around as I done it, and I ain't ashamed to say that we made time back to camp. And Gipper in the stern begging me hurry to go back; and then begging me to hurry to camp, and then dropping forward in the boat to cry into his arms like a sick baby; and I hated the man. You've seen a spider, halfsmashed and with a broken leg or something, wriggling around; and you know how there'll come something surging up in you to make you set your heel on the ugly, squirming thing and grind it into the dirt.

That's the way I felt toward Gipper. He was sweating, and I felt like his sweat was the poison coming out of him. My nose and my eyes and my ears was sick from smelling and seeing and hearing him. I felt like I was getting in the way of the workings of somebody outside the world. I felt like Gipper had been marked and set apart to take that which was coming to him; and I didn't want no part in it. When we landed, and he staggered up the slope to his tent, I took and upset the boat in the lake and washed it out, where he'd been setting. It was my boat— and that show how I felt about Gipper.

Mebbe I was wrong; but I'm giving this the way it happened.

Well, Gipper stayed ashore all that week; but something seems to be dragging at him: and come a Monday, he asked me to take him out the next morning.

"Can't do it," I told him. "I got other plans."

"But I can't go alone," he says, his voice shaking. "And— I've got to go."

I didn't say no more; and he says, "Please— come along."

And I didn't say anything to that, neither; so he saw it wa'n't no use; and all that day I could see he was trying to make himself go out alone, and he asked some others to go with him. But it happened none of them would do it.

So Gipper didn't go out the next morning; and he stayed in his tent all that day.

Nothing happened— but once when I was over that way I heard some one talking inside his tent. Him maybe. That evening he come up to me.

"You ought to have gone out with me." he said in a queer, level tone. "Next week— Tuesday— I must go."

I turned around and went away and left him standing there. I reckon I didn't treat that man right; but I was sure now he'd done it to Radimon; and, anyway, there was something about him that tasted bitter in my mouth. He was unclean, like a leper. Not but what he washed, a-plenty. But he seemed that way— if you know how I mean.

The next Monday night a big man come to camp; an old customer named Hodges. He was big and fat and hearty, and crazy for bass; and he was a crank on fishing in the rain. She started in to rain that night; and this Hodges decides he wants to go fishing first crack in the morning. So I was nominated to take him out.

It struck me that the next morning 'd be Tuesday; but there wasn't no way I could get out of it without a fuss. So me and this Hodges got a boat and started out, first crack o' day.

Gipper hadn't left his tent then. I looked, and I knew.

It was raining in steady, slicing streaks that come right straight down and flailed the water of the lake till the little dancing drops were a constant cloud along the surface; and the rain was warm, and the water itself was steaming in the early morning. It was right comfortable to be out, if you wuz fixed for it; that is, with plenty on or nothing at all. We had rubber boots and oilskins, and oilskin hats, and we were dry enough.

This Hodges decided it wasn't good weather for trolling; but he'd got some helgamites from the boss before we started; and we tried a hole up the shore above camp, and didn't have no luck, so he says:

"Take me across to the Ledge."

That didn't appeal to me. "They ain't biting there like they used to," I says. "But there's a great old hole up the lake a ways."

"Huh-uh," said Hodges, him being a stubborn citizen. "I've got a hunch they'll eat us up over at the Ledge."

Now I didn't want to go to the Ledge, no more'n nothing; and yet I had a sort of a sneaking curiosity, too. So I went along, and we started at one end and anchored there a spell, and moved down a little at a time.

The rain kept coming down in sluices; and you couldn't hardly see your boat's length, it seemed like.

When we got over toward the Ledge I was listening and trying to look around us through the rain. I couldn't help it. And while we wuz fishing down the length of it I kep' this up. Till sure enough there come a noise, a voice— low, and queer-sounding and familiar, somehow.

"What's that?" says Hodges, hearing it. "Some one in trouble up there. Row up that way."

So I did; I give a couple of shoves with the oars, and all of a sudden, out of the mist and the rain, Gipper appeared. He wuz in a canoe, about three-four rods ahead of us.

Hodges see him, too. "Why— he's alone," he says. "Thought I heard him—"

Gipper sees us, and give a sort of yell, and stood up in the canoe, and Hodges turns white.

"The man's crazy," he says.

I sings out: "Hello, Gipper! What's wrong?"

At that he screamed like a woman. "Help, Gipper!" he yells. "Oh, God!"

And he dove over the other side of the canoe and down. In the fog and rain beyond it seemed like I could see something gray and white. But Hodges yells:

"We've got to save him. He's crazy."

I couldn't stay by and see Gipper drown.

He'd gone down, and hadn't come up yet— even if he wuz a good swimmer. So I jerked off my coat and hat and boots, and over I went, Hodges shoving the boat over to Gipper's canoe to stand by.

I went straight down for the bottom; and I see Gipper in a minute, dim, through the water. He was swimming around down there, and he saw me, I guess— for he turned and started to swim away.

I had the start, and I grabbed at his arm; and he whipped around down there fifteen feet under water and fought me. He shoved and scratched at my face, and jerked loose and went up toward the surface; and I went up too for air.

Time I got there, water out of my ears and all, he'd gone down again.

"He's drowning!" Hodges yelled, so I made another try. But this time he got a hold of me, down on the bottom there; and he was crazy, wild, fought like he'd tear me to pieces.

I got all sick inside. It wasn't natural, the way he fought me. And then, all of a sudden, I remembered something.

I had on a gray flannel shirt; and my hair was as white then as 'tis now. He couldn't tell it from a white handkerchief, maybe— under water, that way.

I thought of that, and then all I wanted was to get away; and I did it, somehow. The air and the rain sluicing down felt good, when I got to the surface.

"You're all cut!" Hodges yells. "Did you get him!"

"He fought me," I gasps, trying to get my breath back. "I couldn't manage him."

He helped me into the boat in a hurry.

"He'll come to the surface once more," he says. "Maybe we can grab him then."

But Gipper didn't come to the surface; and the story got around. That sort of made folks stay away from the camp.

HE STOPPED, as though that were all the story. And I waited, and when he did not continue, I said: "But— is that all?"

William had allowed his pipe to go out. He lit it again, with sober care, and nodded. "Yeah," he said. "Yeah, I reck'n that's all."

I found myself trembling a little. "I suppose— it was Mrs. Radimon— swimming there— calling—"

William shook his head steadily.

"Figured you'd think that," he said. "Figured myself she sent him them notes— through th' winter. But— 'twa'n't her that called to Gipper f'om the waters on the Ledge."

"How do you know?" I persisted. "She might have—"

"Twa'n't her." William repeated, "because— when Nick Radimon's boy baby was born t' her that April— she died."

18: The Weird Violin

Anonymous

The Argosy (UK) Dec 1893

THE great Polish violinist, S—, was strolling aimlessly about the town, on a sunny, but cold afternoon, in November of a certain year. He was to play, at night, at one of the great concerts which made the town so musically famous, and, according to his usual custom he was observing passers-by, looking in shop windows, and thinking of anything rather than the approaching ordeal. Not that he was nervous, for none could be less so, but he came to his work all the fresher for an hour or two of idle forgetfulness, and astonished his audiences the more.

Turning out of the busiest street, he ambled into a comparatively quiet thoroughfare, and, throwing away an inch of cigar-end, produced a new havannah, lighting up with every sign of enjoyment. Now, it was part of his rule, when out on these refreshing excursions, to avoid music shops, and he had already passed half-a-dozen without doing more than barely recognise them. It is therefore very remarkable that, walking by a large music warehouse in this quiet thoroughfare, he should suddenly stop, and, after remaining in doubt for a few moments, go straight to the window and look in.

He had not seen anything when he first passed, and, indeed, he had merely ascertained, out of the corner of his eye, that one of the forbidden shops was near. Why, then, did he feel impelled to return?

The window was stocked, as all such windows are, with instruments, music, and such appurtenances as resin, bows, chin-rests, mutes, strings, bridges and pegs. An old Guanerius, valued at several hundred guineas, lay alongside a shilling set of bones, and a flageolet, an ocarina, and several mouth-organs were gracefully grouped upon a gilt-edged copy of "*Elijah*."

Amongst the carefully-arranged violins was a curious old instrument the like of which the virtuoso had never seen before, and at this he now stared with all his eyes. It was an ugly, squat violin, of heavy pattern, and ancient appearance. The maker, whoever he had been, had displayed considerable eccentricity throughout its manufacture, but more especially in the scroll, which, owing to some freak, he had carved into the semblancc of a hideous, grinning face. There was something horribly repulsive about this strange work of art, and yet it also possessed a subtle fascination. The violinist, keeping his eyes upon the face, which seemed to follow his movements with fiendish persistency, slowly edged to the door, and entered the shop.

The attendant came forward, and recognising the well-known performer, bowed low.

"That is a curious-looking fiddle in the window," began the artist, at once, with a wave of his hand in the direction of the fiend.

"Which one, sir?" inquired the attendant. "Oh, the one with the remarkable scroll, you mean. I'll get it for you." Drawing aside a little curtain, he dived into the window-bay, and produced the instrument, whose face seemed to be grinning more maliciously than ever.

"A fair tone, sir," added the man, "but nothing to suit you, I'm sure."

As soon as Herr S— touched the neck of the violin he gripped it convulsively, and raised the instrument to his chin. Then, for a few moments, he stood, firm as a rock, his eyes fixed upon the awe-stricken attendant, evidently without seeing him.

"A bow," said the musician, at length, in a low voice. He stretched out his disengaged hand and took it, without moving his eyes. Then he stopped four strings with his long fingers, and drew the horse-hair smartly over them with one rapid sweep, producing a rich chord in a minor key.

A slight shiver passed over his frame as the notes were struck, and the look of concentration upon his face, changed to one of horror; but he did not cease. Slowly dropping his gaze, the performer met the gibing glance of the scroll-face, and though his own countenance blanched, and his lips tightened, as if to suppress a cry, the bow was raised again, and the violin spoke.

Did the demon whisper to those moving, nervous fingers? It almost seemed to be doing so; and surely such a melody as came from the instrument was born of no human mind. It was slow and measured, but no solemnity was suggested; it thrilled the frame, but with terror, not delight; it was a chain of sounds, which like a sick man's passing fancy, slipped out of the memory as soon as it was evolved, and was incapable of being recalled.

Slowly, when the last strains were lost, the great violinist dropped both arms to his side, and stood for a few moments, grasping violin and bow, without speaking. There were drops of perspiration on his forehead, and he was pale and weary-looking; when he spoke, it was in a faint voice, and he seemed to address himself to something invisible.

"I cannot endure it now," he said. "I will play again to-night."

"Do you wish to play on the instrument at this evening's concert, sir?" inquired the dealer, not without some astonishment at the choice, much as the performance had affected him.

"Yes— yes, of course!" was the reply, given with some irritability, the speaker having apparently roused himself from his semi-stupor.

As the dealer took back the fiddle, he chanced to turn it back uppermost. It was a curiously marked piece of wood, a black patch spreading over a large portion, and throwing an ugly blur upon the otherwise exquisite purling.

"See!" gasped the artist, pointing a shaking finger at this blotch, and clutching at the shopkeeper's shoulder. "Blood!"

"Good gracious!" ejaculated the other, shrinking back in alarm. "Are you ill, sir?"

"Blood, blood!" repeated the half-demented musician, and he staggered out of the shop.

IT WAS night, and the concert-room was crowded to excess. The performers upon the platform, accustomed as they were to such sights, could not but gaze with interest at the restless sea of eager, expectant faces which stretched before them.

That indescribable noise, a multitude of subdued murmurs, accompanied by the discordant scraping of strings, and blowing of reeds, was at its height; now and then a loud trombone would momentarily assert itself, or an oboe's plaintive notes would rise above the tumult; and, in short, the moment of intense excitement which immediately precedes the entrance of the conductor was at hand.

Suddenly, the long-continued confusion ceased, and, for an incalculably short space of time, silence reigned. Then a storm of deafening applause burst forth; necks were craned, and eyes strained in vain attempts to catch an early glimpse of the great violinist who was to open the concert by playing a difficult Concerto of Spohr.

It was noticed, that as the virtuoso followed the grey-haired conductor to the centre of the platform, he was unusually pale; and those who were seated at no great distance from the orchestra, observed also that he carried a curious violin, instead of the Stradivarius upon which he was wont to perform.

A tap on the conductor's desk, a short, breathless silence, and the sweet strains of the opening bars issued from the instruments of a hundred able musicians.

The soloist, with a sinking at the heart which he could scarcely account for, raised the violin to his shoulder, and saw, for the first time, that it had been re-strung. As he invariably left stringing and tuning to others, this would appear to have been a matter of no moment, and yet it had a strange effect upon him. Again that shudder passed through his body, and again he unwillingly met the glance of those diabolical eyes upon the scroll. Horror of horrors! was the face alive, or was he going mad?

The band, which had swelled out to a loud *forté*, now dropped to a *pianissimo*. The moment had arrived. Herr S— raised his bow, and commenced the lovely *adagio*.

What had come to him? Where were the concert room, the orchestra, the anxious crowd of people? What sounds were these? This was not Spohr, this

sweet melody so like, and yet so unlike the weird music which he had played in the dealer's shop. What subtle magic had so acted upon those strains that their horror, their cruel mockery had entirely vanished, and sweet, pure harmony alone remained?

It seemed to the player that he stood within a small, but comfortably furnished room. Two figures were in the room, those of a beautiful young girl, and of a dark, handsome, foreign-looking man.

There was something in the face of the latter which vividly recalled the face upon the scroll, and, strange to say, a counterpart of the violin itself rested under the man's chin.

The girl was seated at a harpsichord, and, as she played, her companion accompanied her upon his strange instrument. From the costume of both, the dreamer concluded that they were phantoms of a hundred years ago.

"Ernestine," the man was saying, in a low voice, as he passed his bow over the strings, "tell me to-night that you have not dismissed me for ever. I can wait for your love."

"It is useless," replied the girl— "oh, it is quite useless! Why importune me further? I could never love you, even if I were not already promised to another."

A savage light gleamed in the man's eye, and more than ever he looked like the face on the violin; but he did not immediately reply and the music went on.

"You tell me it is useless," he said, at length, "and I tell you that it is useless. Useless for you to think of him. Do you hear?" he continued, lowering his violin, and leaning towards her. "You shall never marry him; I swear it by my soul."

The girl shrank from him, and the music ceased. Though he did not know it, the dreaming violinist had reached the conclusion of the adagio movement. He did not hear the deafening plaudits which greeted the fall of his bow; he knew nothing of the enthusiasm of the orchestra, or the praise of the conductor; he heard no more music.

Look! what is this? The girl has seated herself upon a couch, and her lover, his violin still in his left hand, is kneeling at her feet, passionately imploring her to listen. She expostulates for awhile, then repulses him and rises. A malignant fire darts from the furious foreigner's eyes; something bright gleams in his hand; he rushes forward, raises his arm to strike—

The *presto* movement had commenced, and an extraordinary circumstance soon made itself apparent to the audience. The violinist was running away with the band. Greatly to the horror of the conductor, the tempo had to be increased until a *prestissimo* was reached. Still the performer was not satisfied, there seemed no limit to his powers to-night; his fingers literally flew up and down the fingerboard; his bow shot to-and-fro with incredible swiftness; and yet the music grew quicker, quicker, until the unhappy conductor, who with difficulty pulled along the toiling band, felt that a fiasco was inevitable.

On, on rushed the fingers and the bow, faster, and faster still: a few of the bandsmen fell off from sheer exhaustion, and stared, horror-stricken, at the mad violinist. Some of the listeners rose in alarm, and many were only detained, by extreme anxiety, from bursting into loud and frantic applause.

Suddenly, with the loud snap of a string, the spell was broken. The orchestra, unable now to proceed, stopped in utter confusion, and a loud sigh of released suspense went up from thousands of throats. Then the whole mass rose in sudden horror, as the violinist dropped his instrument with a crash upon the platform, stared wildly around, clasped a hand to his side, and, with a strange cry, fell to the ground insensible.

For weeks the great violinist lay between life and death; then nature reasserted herself, and he recovered. But it was long, very long, ere he could again appear in public; whilst the weird and mysterious violin never again sent forth its strange and mysterious influence. It had been hopelessly shattered in that last night of its performance, which had well-nigh proved fatal to the world-famed player.

19: The Sundial

R. H. Malden

1879-1951

Leeds Parish Church Magazine Dec 1930

Collected in: *Nine Ghosts*, 1943

THE FOLLOWING STORY came into my hands by pure chance. I had wandered into a second-hand book-shop in the neighbourhood of the Charing Cross Road and was about to leave it empty-handed. On a shelf near the door my eye fell upon a copy of Hacket's *Scrinia Reserata* solidly bound in leather, which I thought well worth the few shillings which the proprietor was willing to accept for it. It is not an easy book to come by, and is of real value to anyone who wants to understand certain aspects of English Church History during the first half of the seventeenth century.

When I opened the book at home a thickish wad of paper fell out. It proved to consist of several sheets of foolscap covered with writing. I have reproduced the contents word for word.

From the look of the paper I judged that it had been there for at least thirty years. The author had not signed it, and there was nothing to indicate to whom the book had belonged. I think I could make a guess at the neighbourhood to which the story relates, and if I am right it should not be difficult to identify the house and discover the name of the tenant. But as he seems to have wished to remain anonymous he shall do so, as far as I am concerned.

The form of the story suggests that he intended to publish it; probably in some magazine. As far as I know it has not been printed before.

I BELONG TO one of the numerous middle-class English families which for several generations have followed various professions, with credit, but without ever attaining any very special distinction. In our own case India could almost claim us as hereditary bondsmen. For more than a century most of our men had made their way there, and had served John Company or the Crown in various capacities. One of my uncles had risen to be Legal Member of the Viceroy's Council. So when my own time came, to India I went— in the Civil Service— and there I lived for five and twenty years.

My career was neither more nor less adventurous than the average. The routine of my work was occasionally broken by experiences which would sound incredible to an English reader, and therefore need not be set down here. Just before the time came for my retirement a legacy made me a good deal better off than I had had any reason to expect to be. So upon my return to England I found that it would be possible for me to adopt the life of a country gentleman,

upon a modest scale, but with the prospect of finding sufficient occupation and amusement.

I was never married, and had been too long out of England to have any very strong ties remaining. I was free to establish myself where I pleased, and the advertisements in the *Field* and *Country Life* offered houses of every description in every part of the kingdom. After much correspondence, and some fruitless journeys, I came upon one which seemed to satisfy my requirements. It lay about sixty miles north of London upon a main line of railway. That was an important point, as I was a Fellow of both the Asiatic and Historical Societies, and had long looked forward to attending their meetings regularly. As a boy I had known the neighbourhood slightly and had liked it, though it is not generally considered beautiful. There were two packs of hounds within reach, which could be followed with such a stable as I should be able to afford.

The house was an old one. It had been a good deal larger, but part had been battered down during the Civil War, when it was besieged by the Parliamentary troops, and never rebuilt. It belonged to one of the largest landowners in the county, whom I will call Lord Rye. It generally served as the dower-house of the family, but as there was at that moment no dowager Countess, and as Lord Rye himself was a young man, and both his sisters were married, it was not likely to be wanted for some time to come. It had been unoccupied for nearly two years. The last tenant, a retired doctor, had been found dead on the lawn at the bottom of the steps leading up to the garden door. His heart had been in a bad condition for some time past, so that his sudden death was not surprising; but the neighbouring village viewed the incident with some suspicion. One or two of the older people professed to remember traditions of 'trouble' there in former years.

This had made it difficult to get a caretaker, and as Lord Rye was anxious to let again he was willing to take an almost nominal rent. In fact his whole attitude suggested that I was doing him a favour by becoming his tenant. About five hundred acres of shooting generally went with the house, and I was glad to find that I could have them very cheaply.

I moved in at midsummer, and each day made me more and more pleased with my new surroundings.

After my years in India the garden was a particular source of delight to me; but I will not describe it more minutely than is necessary to make what follows intelligible. Behind the house was a good-sized lawn, flanked by shrubbery. On the far side, parallel with the house, ran a splendid yew hedge, nearly fifteen feet high and very thick. It came up to the shrubbery at either end, but was pierced by two archways about thirty yards apart, giving access to the flower-garden beyond. Almost in the middle of the lawn was an old tree stump, or what looked like one, some three feet high. Though covered with ivy it was not

picturesque, and I told Lord Rye that I should like to take it up. 'Do by all means,' he said, 'I certainly should if I lived here. I believe poor Riley (the last tenant) intended to put a sundial there. I think it would look rather nice, don't you?'

This struck me as a good idea. I ordered a sundial from a well-known firm of heliological experts in Cockspur Street, and ordered the stump to be grubbed up as soon as it arrived.

One morning towards the end of September I woke unrefreshed after a night of troubled dreams. I could not recall them very distinctly, but I had seemed to be trying to lift a very heavy weight of some kind from the ground. But, before I could raise it, an overwhelming terror had taken hold of me— though I could not remember why— and I woke to find my forehead wet with perspiration. Each time I fell asleep again the dream repeated itself with mechanical regularity, though the details did not become any more distinct. So I was heartily glad it had become late enough to get up. The day was wet and chilly. I felt tired and unwell, and was, moreover, depressed by a vague sense of impending disaster. This was accentuated by a feeling that it lay within my power to avert the catastrophe, if only I could discover what it was.

In the afternoon the weather cleared, and I thought that a ride would do me good. I rode fairly hard for some distance, and it was past five o'clock before I had reached my own bounds'-ditch on my way home. At that particular place a small wood ran along the edge of my property for about a quarter of a mile. I was riding slowly down the outside, and was perhaps a hundred yards from the angle where I meant to turn it, when I noticed a man standing at the corner. The light was beginning to fail, and he was so close to the edge of the wood that at first I could not be sure whether it was a human figure, or only an oddly shaped tree-stump which I had never noticed before. But when I got a little nearer I saw that my first impression had been correct, and that it was a man. He seemed to be dressed like an ordinary agricultural labourer. He was standing absolutely still and seemed to be looking very intently in my direction. But he was shading his eyes with his hand, so that I could not make out his face. Before I had got close enough to make him out more definitely he turned suddenly and vanished round the corner of the wood. His movements were rapid: but he somehow gave the impression of being deformed, though in what precise respect I could not tell. Naturally my suspicions were stirred, so I put my horse to a canter. But when we had reached the corner he shied violently, and I had some difficulty in getting him to pass it. When we had got round, the mysterious man was nowhere to be seen. In front and on the left hand lay a very large stubble field, without a vestige of cover of any kind. I could see that he was not crossing it, and unless he had flown he could not have reached the other side.

On the right hand lay the ditch bounding the wood. As is usual in that country it was both wide and deep, and had some two or three feet of mud and

water at the bottom. If the man had gone that way he had some very pressing reason for wishing to avoid me: and I could detect no trace of his passage at any point.

So there was nothing to be done but go home, and tell the policeman next day to keep his eyes open for any suspicious strangers. However, no attempts were made upon any of my belongings, and when October came my pheasants did not seem to have been unlawfully diminished.

October that year was stormy, and one Saturday night about the middle of the month it blew a regular gale. I lay awake long listening to the wind, and to all the confused sounds which fill an old house in stormy weather. Twice I seemed to hear footsteps in the passage. Once I could have almost sworn my door was cautiously opened and closed again. When at last I dropped off I was disturbed by a repetition of my former dream. But this time the details were rather more distinct. Again I was trying to lift a heavy weight from the ground: but now I knew that there was something hidden under it. What the concealed object might be I could not tell, but as I worked to bring it to light a feeling began to creep over me that I did not want to see it. This soon deepened into horror at the bare idea of seeing it: though I had still no notion what manner of thing it might be. Yet I could not abandon my task. So presently I found myself in the position of working hard to accomplish what I would have given the world to have left undone. At this point I woke, to find myself shaking with fright, and repeating aloud the apparently meaningless sentence— 'If you'll pull, I'll push.'

I did not sleep for the rest of that night. Beside the noise of the storm the prospect of a repetition of that dream was quite enough to keep me awake. To add to my discomfort a verse from Ecclesiastes ran in my head with dismal persistence— 'But if a man live many years and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many.' Days of darkness seemed to be coming upon me now, and my mind was filled with vague alarm.

The next day was fine, and after Church I thought I would see how my fruit trees had fared during the night. The kitchen-garden was enclosed by a high brick wall. On the side nearest the house there were two doors, which were always kept locked on Sunday. In the wall opposite was a trap-door, about three feet square, giving on to a rather untidy piece of ground, partly orchard and partly waste. When I had unlocked the door I saw standing by the opposite wall the figure which I had seen at the corner of the wood. His neck was abnormally long, and so malformed that his head lolled sideways on to his right shoulder in a disgusting and almost inhuman fashion. He was bent almost double; and I think he was misshapen in some other respect as well. But of that I could not be certain. He raised his hand with what seemed to be a threatening gesture, then turned, and slipped through the trap-door with remarkable quickness. I was after him immediately, but on reaching the opposite wall received a shock which

stopped me like a physical blow. The trap-door was shut and bolted on the inside. I tried to persuade myself that a violent slam might make the bolts shoot, but I knew that that was really impossible. I had to choose between two explanations. Either my visitor was a complete hallucination, or else he possessed the unusual power of being able to bolt a door upon the side on which he himself was not. The latter was upon the whole the more comforting, and— in view of some of my Indian experiences— the more probable, supposition.

After a little hesitation I opened the trap and, as there was nothing to be seen, got through it and went up to the top of the orchard, where the kennels lay. But neither of my dogs would follow the scent. When brought to the spot where his feet must have touched the ground they whined and showed every symptom of alarm. When I let go of their collars they hurried home in a way which showed plainly what they thought of the matter.

This seemed to dispose of the idea of hallucination, and, as before, there was nothing else to be done but await developments as patiently as I could. For the next fortnight nothing remarkable took place. I had my usual health and as near an approach to my usual spirits as could reasonably be expected. I had visitors for part of the time, but no one to whom I should have cared to confide the story at this stage. I was not molested further by day, and my dreams, though varied, were not alarming.

On the morning of the 31st I received a letter announcing that my sundial had been despatched, and it duly arrived in the course of the afternoon. It was heavy, so by the time we had got it out of the railway van and on to the lawn it was too late to place it in position that day. The men departed to drink my health, and I turned towards the house. Just as I reached the door I paused. A sensation— familiar to all men who are much alone— had come over me, and I felt as if I were being watched from behind. Usually the feeling can be dispelled by turning round. I did so, but on this occasion the sense that I was not alone merely increased. Of course the lawn was deserted, but I stood looking across it for a few moments, telling myself that I must not let my nerves play me tricks. Then I saw a face detach itself slowly from the darkness of the hedge at one side of the left-hand arch. For a few seconds it hung, horribly poised, in the middle of the opening like a mask suspended by an invisible thread. Then the body to which it belonged slid into the clear space, and I saw my acquaintance of the wood and kitchen-garden, this time sharply outlined against a saffron sky. There could be no mistaking his bowed form and distorted neck, but now his appearance was made additionally abominable by his expression. The yellow sunset light seemed to stream all round him, and showed me features convulsed with fury. He gnashed his teeth and clawed the air with both hands. I have never seen such a picture of impotent rage.

It was more by instinct than by any deliberate courage that I ran straight across the lawn towards him. He was gone in a flash, and when I came through the archway where he had stood he was hurrying down the side of the hedge towards the other. He moved with an odd shuffling gait, and I made sure that I should soon overtake him. But to my surprise I found that I did not gain much. His limping shuffle took him over the ground as fast as I could cover it. In fact, when I reached the point from which I had started I thought I had actually lost a little. When we came round for the second time there was no doubt about it. This was humiliating, but I persevered, relying now on superior stamina. But during the third circuit it suddenly flashed upon me that our positions had become reversed. I was no longer the pursuer. He— it— whatever the creature was, was now chasing me, and the distance between us was diminishing rapidly.

I am not ashamed to admit that my nerve failed completely. I believe I screamed aloud. I ran on stumblingly, helplessly, as one runs in a dream, knowing now that the creature behind was gaining at every stride. How long the chase lasted I do not know, but presently I could hear his irregular footstep close behind me, and a horrible dank breath played about the back of my neck. We were on the side towards the house when I looked up and saw my butler standing at the garden door, with a note in his hand. The sight of his prosaic form seemed to break the spell which had kept me running blindly round and round the hedge. I was almost exhausted, but I tore across the lawn, and fell in a heap at the bottom of the steps.

Parker was an ex-sergeant of Marines, which amounts to saying that he was incapable of surprise and qualified to cope with any practical emergency which could arise. He picked me up, helped me into the house, gave me a tumbler of brandy diluted with soda-water, and fortified himself with another, without saying a word. How much he saw, or what he thought of it, I could never learn, for all subsequent approaches to the question were parried with the evasive skill which seems to be the birthright of all them that go down to the sea in ships. But his general view of the situation is indicated by the fact that he sent for the Rector, not the doctor, and— as I learned afterwards— had a private conference with him before he left the house. Soon afterwards he joined the choir— or in his own phrase 'assisted with the singing in the chancel'— and for many months the village church had no more regular or vocal attendant.

The Rector heard my story gravely, and was by no means disposed to make light of it. Something similar had come his way once before, when he had had the charge of a parish on the Northumbrian Border. He was confident, he said, that no harm could come to me that night, if I remained indoors, and departed to look up some of his authorities on such subjects.

That night was noisy with wind, so the insistent knocking which I seemed to hear during the small hours at the garden-door and ground-floor windows,

which were secured with outside shutters, may have had no existence outside my imagination. I had asked Parker to occupy a dressing-room opening out of my bedroom for the night. He seemed very ready to do so, but I do not think that he slept very much either. Early next morning the Rector reappeared, saying that he thought he had got a clue, though it was impossible to say yet how much it might be worth. He had brought with him the first volume of the parish register, and showed me the following note on the inside of the cover:

'October 31st, 1578. On this day Jn. Croxton a Poore Man hanged himself from a Beame within his House. He was a very stubborn Popish Recusant and ye manner of his Death was in accord with his whole Life. He was buried that evening at ye Cross Roades.'

'It is unfortunate,' continued the Rector, 'that we have no sixteenth-century map of the parish. But there is a map of 1759 which marks a hamlet at the cross-roads just outside your gate. The hamlet doesn't exist now— you know that the population hereabouts is much less than it used to be— but it used to be called New Cross. I think that must mean that these particular cross-roads are comparatively recent. Now this house is known to have been built between 1596 and 1602. The straight way from Farley to Abbotsholme would lie nearly across its site. I think, therefore, that the Elizabethan Lord Rye diverted the old road when he laid out his grounds. That would also account for the loop which the present road makes'— here he traced its course with his finger on the map which he had brought.

'Now I strongly suspect that your visitor was Mr. Croxton, and that he is buried somewhere in your grounds. If we could find the place I think we could keep him quiet for the future. But I am afraid that there is nothing to guide us.'

At this point Parker came in. 'Beg your pardon, Sir, but Hardman is wishful to speak to you. About that there bollard on the quarter-deck, Sir— stump on the lawn, I should have said, Sir— what you told him to put over the side.'

We went out, and found Hardman and the boy looking at a large hole in the lawn. By the side of it lay what we had taken for a tree stump. But it had never struck root there. It was a very solid wooden stake, some nine feet in length over all, with a sharp point. It had been driven some six feet into the ground, passing through a layer of rubble about three feet from the surface. At the bottom the hole widened, forming a large, and plainly artificial, cavity. The earth here looked as if it had been recently disturbed, but the condition of the stake showed that that was impossible. It was obvious to both of us that we had come upon Mr. Croxton's grave, at the original cross-roads, and that what had appeared to be a natural stump was really the stake which had been driven through it to keep him there. We did not, of course, take the gardeners into our confidence, but told them to leave the place for the present as it might contain

some interesting antiques— presumably Roman— which we would get out carefully with our own hands.

We soon enlarged the shaft sufficiently to explore the cavity at the bottom. We had naturally expected to find a skeleton, or something of the sort, there, but we were disappointed. We could not discover the slightest vestige of bones or body, or of any dust except that of natural soil. Once while we were working we were startled by a harsh sound like the cry of a night-jar, apparently very close at hand. But whatever it was passed away very quickly, as if the creature which had made it was on the wing, and it was not repeated.

By the Rector's advice we went to the churchyard and brought away sufficient consecrated earth to fill up the cavity. The shaft was filled up, and the sundial securely planted on top of it. The pious mottoes with which it was adorned, according to custom, assumed for the first time a practical significance.

'It not infrequently happens,' said the Rector, 'that those who for any reason have not received full Christian Burial are unable, or unwilling, to remain quiet in their graves, particularly if the interment has been at all carelessly carried out in the first instance. They seem to be particularly active on or about the anniversary of their death in any year. The range of their activities is varied, and it would be difficult to define the nature of the power which animates them, or the source from which it is derived. But I incline to think that it is less their own personality than some force inherent in the earth itself, of which they become the vehicle. With the exception of Vampires (who are altogether *sui generis* and virtually unknown in this country), they can seldom do much direct physical harm. They operate indirectly by terrifying, but are commonly compelled to stop there. But it is always necessary for them to have free access to their graves. If that is obstructed in any way their power seems to lapse. That is why I think that their vitality is in some way bred of the earth: and I am sure that you won't be troubled with any more visits now.

'Our friend was afraid that your sundial would interfere with his convenience, and I think he was trying to frighten you into leaving the house. Of course, if your heart had been weak he might have disposed of you as he did of your unfortunate predecessor. His projection of himself into your dreams was part of his general plan: I incline to think, however, that it was an error of judgment, as it might have put you on your guard. But I very much doubt whether he could have inflicted any physical injury on you if he had caught you yesterday afternoon.'

'H'm,' said I, 'you might be right there. But I am very glad that I shall never know.'

Next day Parker asked for leave to go to London. He returned with a large picture representing King Solomon issuing directions to a corvée of demons of repellent aspect whom he had (according to a well-known Jewish legend)

compelled to labour at the building of the Temple. This he proceeded to affix with drawing-pins to the inside of the pantry door. He called my attention to it particularly, and said that he had got it from a Jew whom he had known in Malta, who had recently opened a branch establishment in the Whitechapel Road. I ventured to make some comment on the singularity of the subject, but Parker was, as usual, impenetrable. 'Beggin' your pardon, Sir,' he said, 'there's some things what a civilian don't never 'ave no chance of learnin', not even if 'e 'ad the brains for it. I done my twenty-one years in the Service— *in puris naturalibus* all the time as the saying is— and' (pointing to the figure of the King) you may lay to it that that there man knew 'is business.'

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20: The Journey to Bruges

Katherine Mansfield

Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp, 1888-1923

Collected in *Something Childish*, 1924 (US *The Little Girl*)

"YOU GOT three-quarters of an hour," said the porter. "You got an hour mostly. Put it in the cloak-room, lady."

A German family, their luggage neatly buttoned into what appeared to be odd canvas trouser legs, filled the entire space before the counter, and a homoeopathic young clergyman, his black dicky flapping over his shirt, stood at my elbow. We waited and waited, for the cloak-room porter could not get rid of the German family, who appeared by their enthusiasm and gestures to be explaining to him the virtue of so many buttons. At last the wife of the party seized her particular packet and started to undo it. Shrugging his shoulders, the porter turned to me. "Where for?" he asked.

"Ostend."

"Wot are you putting it in here for?" I said, "Because I've a long time to wait."

He shouted, "Train's in 2.20. No good bringing it here. Hi, you there, lump it off!"

My porter lumped it. The young clergyman, who had listened and remarked, smiled at me radiantly. "The train is in," he said, "really in. You've only a few moments, you know." My sensitiveness glimpsed a symbol in his eye. I ran to the book-stall. When I returned I had lost my porter. In the teasing heat I ran up and down the platform. The whole travelling world seemed to possess a porter and glory in him except me. Savage and wretched I saw them watch me with that delighted relish of the hot in the very much hotter. "One could have a fit running in weather like this," said a stout lady, eating a farewell present of grapes. Then I was informed that the train was not yet in. I had been running up and down the Folkstone express. On a higher platform I found my porter sitting on the suit case.

"I knew you'd be doin' that," he said, airily.

"I nearly come and stop you. I seen you from' ere."

I dropped into a smoking compartment with four young men, two of whom were saying good-bye to a pale youth with a cane. "Well, good-bye, old chap. It's frightfully good of you to have come down. I knew you. I knew the same old slouch. Now, look here, when we come back we'll have a night of it. What? Ripping of you to have come, old man." This from an enthusiast, who lit a cigar as the train swung out, turned to his companion and said, "Frightfully nice chap, but— lord— what a bore!" His companion, who was dressed entirely in mole, even unto his socks and hair, smiled gently. I think his brain must have been the

same colour: he proved so gentle and sympathetic a listener. In the opposite corner to me sat a beautiful young Frenchman with curly hair and a watch-chain from which dangled a silver fish, a ring, a silver shoe, and a medal. He stared out of the window the whole time, faintly twitching his nose. Of the remaining member there was nothing to be seen from behind his luggage but a pair of tan shoes and a copy of *The Snark's Summer Annual*.

"Look here, old man," said the Enthusiast, "I want to change all our places. You know those arrangements you've made— I want to cut them out altogether. Do you mind?"

"No," said the Mole, faintly. "But why?"

"Well, I was thinking it over in bed last night, and I'm hanged if I can see the good of us paying fifteen bob if we don't want to. You see what I mean?" The Mole took off his pince-nez and breathed on them. "Now I don't want to unsettle you," went on the Enthusiast, "because, after all, it's your party— you asked me. I wouldn't upset it for anything, but— there you are— you see— what?"

Suggested the Mole: "I'm afraid people will be down on me for taking you abroad."

Straightway the other told him how sought after he had been. From far and near, people who were full up for the entire month of August had written and begged for him. He wrung the Mole's heart by enumerating those longing homes and vacant chairs dotted all over England, until the Mole deliberated between crying and going to sleep. He chose the latter.

They all went to sleep except the young Frenchman, who took a little pocket edition out of his coat and nursed it on his knee while he gazed at the warm, dusty country. At Shorncliffe the train stopped. Dead silence. There was nothing to be seen but a large white cemetery. Fantastic it looked in the late afternoon sun, its full-length marble angels appearing to preside over a cheerless picnic of the Shorncliffe departed on the brown field. One white butterfly flew over the railway lines. As we crept out of the station I saw a poster advertising the Athenaeum. The Enthusiast grunted and yawned, shook himself into existence by rattling the money in his trouser pockets. He jabbed the Mole in the ribs. "I say, we're nearly there! Can you get down those beastly golf-clubs of mine from the rack?" My heart yearned over the Mole's immediate future, but he was cheerful and offered to find me a porter at Dover, and strapped my parasol in with my rugs. We saw the sea. "It's going to be beastly rough," said the Enthusiast, "Gives you a head, doesn't it? Look here, I know a tip for sea-sickness, and it's this: You lie on your back— flat— you know, cover your face, and eat nothing but biscuits."

"Dover!" shouted a guard.

In the act of crossing the gangway we renounced England. The most blatant British female produced her mite of French: we "S'il vous plaît'd" one another on the deck, "Merci'd" one another on the stairs, and "Pardon'd" to our heart's content in the saloon. The stewardess stood at the foot of the stairs, a stout, forbidding female, pockmarked, her hands hidden under a businesslike-looking apron. She replied to our salutations with studied indifference, mentally ticking off her prey. I descended to the cabin to remove my hat. One old lady was already established there.

She lay on a rose and white couch, a black shawl tucked round her, fanning herself with a black feather fan. Her grey hair was half covered with a lace cap and her face gleamed from the black drapings and rose pillows with charming old-world dignity. There was about her a faint rustling and the scents of camphor and lavender. As I watched her, thinking of Rembrandt and, for some reason, Anatole France, the stewardess bustled up, placed a canvas stool at her elbow, spread a newspaper upon it, and banged down a receptacle rather like a baking tin. I went up on deck. The sea was bright green, with rolling waves. All the beauty and artificial flower of France had removed their hats and bound their heads in veils. A number of young German men, displaying their national bulk in light-coloured suits cut in the pattern of pyjamas, promenaded. French family parties— the female element in chairs, the male in graceful attitudes against the ship's side— talked already with that brilliance which denotes friction! I found a chair in a corner against a white partition, but unfortunately this partition had a window set in it for the purpose of providing endless amusement for the curious, who peered through it, watching those bold and brave spirits who walked "for'ard" and were drenched and beaten by the waves. In the first half-hour the excitement of getting wet and being pleaded with, and rushing into dangerous places to return and be rubbed down, was all-absorbing. Then it palled— the parties drifted into silence. You would catch them staring intently at the ocean— and yawning. They grew cold and snappy. Suddenly a young lady in a white woollen hood with cherry bows got up from her chair and swayed over to the railings. We watched her, vaguely sympathetic. The young man with whom she had been sitting called to her.

"Are you better?" Negative expressed.

He sat up in his chair. "Would you like me to hold your head?"

"No," said her shoulders

"Would you care for a coat round you?... Is it over?... Are you going to remain there?"... He looked at her with infinite tenderness. I decided never again to call men unsympathetic, and to believe in the allconquering power of love until I died— but never put it to the test. I went down to sleep.

I lay down opposite the old lady, and watched the shadows spinning over the ceilings and the wave-drops shining on the portholes.

In the shortest sea voyage there is no sense of time. You have been down in the cabin for hours or days or years. Nobody knows or cares. You know all the people to the point of indifference. You do not believe in dry land any more—you are caught in the pendulum itself, and left there, idly swinging. The light faded.

I fell asleep, to wake to find the stewardess shaking me. "We are there in two minutes," said she. Forlorn ladies, freed from the embrace of Neptune, knelt upon the floor and searched for their shoes and hairpins— only the old and dignified one lay passive, fanning herself. She looked at me and smiled.

"*Grâce de Dieu, c'est fini*," she quavered in a voice so fine it seemed to quaver on a thread of lace.

I lifted up my eyes. "*Oui, c'est fini!*"

"*Vous allez à Strasbourg, Madame*?"

"No," I said. "Bruges."

"That is a great pity," said she, closing her fan and the conversation. I could not think why, but I had visions of myself perhaps travelling in the same railway carriage with her, wrapping her in the black shawl, of her falling in love with me and leaving me unlimited quantities of money and old lace...These sleepy thoughts pursued me until I arrived on deck.

The sky was indigo blue, and a great many stars were shining: our little ship stood black and sharp in the clear air. "Have you the tickets?...Yes, they want the tickets...Produce your tickets!"...We were squeezed over the gangway, shepherded into the custom house, where porters heaved our luggage on to long wooden slabs, and an old man wearing horn spectacles checked it without a word.

"Follow me!" shouted the villainous-looking creature whom I had endowed with my worldly goods. He leapt on to a railway line, and I leapt after him. He raced along a platform, dodging the passengers and fruit wagons, with the security of a cinematograph figure. I reserved a seat and went to buy fruit at a little stall displaying grapes and greengages. The old lady was there, leaning on the arm of a large blond man, in white, with a flowing tie. We nodded.

"Buy me," she said in her delicate voice, "three ham sandwiches, mon cher!"

"And some cakes," said he.

"Yes, and perhaps a bottle of lemonade."

"Romance is an imp!" thought I, climbing up into the carriage. The train swung out of the station; the air, blowing through the open windows, smelled of fresh leaves. There were sudden pools of light in the darkness; when I arrived at Bruges the bells were ringing, and white and mysterious shone the moon over the Grand Place.

21: The Haunted Burglar

W. C. Morrow

1853-1923

1897; Collected in: *The Monster Maker and other stories*, 2000

ANTHONY ROSS doubtless had the oddest and most complex temperament that ever assured the success of burglary as a business. This fact is mentioned in order that those who choose may employ it as an explanation of the extraordinary ideas that entered his head and gave a strangely tragic character to his career.

Though ignorant, the man had an uncommonly fine mind in certain aspect. Thus it happened that, while lacking moral perception, he cherished an artistic pride in the smooth, elegant, and finished conduct of his work. Hence a blunder on his part invariably filled him with grief and humiliation; and it was the steadily increasing recurrence of these errors that finally impelled him to make a deliberate analysis of his case.

Among the stupid acts with which he charged himself was the murder of the banker Uriah Mattson, a feeble old man whom a simple choking or a sufficient tap on the skull would have rendered helpless. Instead of that, he had choked his victim to death in the most brutal and unnecessary manner, and in doing so had used the fingers of his left hand in a singularly sprawled and awkward fashion. The whole act was utterly unlike him; it appalled and horrified him,--not for the sin of taking human life, but because it was unnecessary, dangerous, subversive of the principles of skilled burglary, and monstrously inartistic.

A similar mishap had occurred in the case of Miss Jellison, a wealthy spinster, merely because she was in the act of waking, which meant an ensuing scream. In this case, as in the other, he was unspeakably shocked to discover that the fatal choking had been done by the left hand, with sprawled and awkward fingers, and with a savage ferocity entirely uncalled for by his peril.

In setting himself to analyze these incongruous and revolting things he dragged forth from his memory numerous other acts, unlike those two in detail, but similar to them in spirit. Thus, in a fit of passionate anger at the whimpering of an infant, he had flung it brutally against the wall.

Another time he was nearly discovered through the needless torturing of a cat, whose cries set pursuers at his heels. These and other insane, inartistic, and ferocious acts he arrayed for serious analysis.

Finally the realization burst upon him that all his aberrations of conduct had proceeded from his left hand and arm. Search his recollection ever so diligently, he could not recall a single instance wherein his right hand had failed to proceed on perfectly fine, sure, and artistic lines.

When he made this discovery he realized that he had brought himself face to face with a terrifying mystery; and its horrors were increased when he reflected that while his left hand had committed acts of stupid atrocity in the pursuit of his burglarious enterprises, on many occasions when he was not so engaged it had acted with a less harmful but none the less coarse, irrational, and inartistic purpose.

It was not difficult for such a man to arrive at strange conclusions. The explanation that promptly suggested itself, and that his coolest and shrewdest wisdom could not shake, was that his left arm was under the dominion of a perverse and malicious spirit, that it was an entity apart from his own spirit, and that it had fastened itself upon that part of his body to produce his ruin.

It were useless, however inviting, to speculate upon the order of mind capable of arriving at such a conclusion; it is more to the point to narrate the terrible happenings to which it gave rise.

About a month after the burglar's mental struggle a strange-looking man applied for a situation at a saw-mill a hundred miles away. His appearance was exceedingly distressing. Either a grievous bodily illness or fearful mental anguish had made his face wan and haggard and filled his eyes with the light of a hard desperation that gave promise of dire results. There were no marks of a vagabond on his clothing or in his manner. He did not seem to be suffering for physical necessities. He held his head aloft and walked like a man, and an understanding glance would have seen that his look of determination meant something profounder and more far-reaching than the ordinary business concerns of life.

He gave the name of Hope. His manner was so engaging, yet withal so firm and abstracted, that he secured a position without difficulty; and so faithfully did he work, and so quick was his intelligence, that in good time his request to be given the management of a saw was grantcd. It might have been noticed that his face thereupon wore a deeper and more haggard look, but that its rigors were softened by a light of happy expectancy. As he cultivated no friendships among the men, he had no confidants; he went his dark way alone to the end.

He seemed to take more than the pleasure of an efficient workman in observing the products of his skill. He would stealthily hug the big brown logs as they approached the saw, and his eyes would blaze when the great tool went singing and roaring at its work. The foreman, mistaking this eagerness for carelessness, quietly cautioned him to beware; but when the next log was mounted for the saw the stranger appeared to slip and fall. He clasped the moving log in his arms, and the next moment the insatiable teeth had severed his left arm near the shoulder, and the stranger sank with a groan into the soft sawdust that filled the pit.

There was the usual commotion attending such accidents, for the faces of the workmen turn white when they see one of their number thus maimed for life. But Hope received good surgical care, and in due time was able to be abroad. Then the men observed that a remarkable change had come over him. His moroseness had disappeared, and in its stead was a hearty cheer of manner that amazed them. Was the losing of a precious arm a thing to make a wretched man happy? Hope was given light work in the office, and might have remained to the end of his days a competent and prosperous man; but one day he left, and was never seen thereabout again.

Then Anthony Ross, the burglar, reappeared upon the scenes of his former exploits. The police were dismayed to note the arrival of a man whom all their skill had been unable to convict of terrible crimes which they were certain he had committed, and they questioned him about the loss of his arm; but he laughed them away with the fine old sangfroid with which they were familiar, and soon his handiwork appeared in reports of daring burglaries.

A watch of extraordinary care and minuteness was set upon him, but that availed nothing until a singular thing occurred to baffle the officers beyond measure: Ross had suddenly become wildly reckless and walked red-handed into the mouth of the law. By evidence that seemed indisputable a burglary and atrocious murder were traced to him. Stranger than all else, he made no effort to escape, though leaving a hanging trail behind him. When the officers overhauled him, they found him in a state of utter dejection, wholly different from the lighthearted bearing that had characterized him ever since he had returned without his left arm. Neither admitting nor denying his guilt, he bore himself with the hopelessness of a man already condemned to the gallows.

Even when he was brought before a jury and placed on trial, he made no fight for his life.

Although possessed of abundant means, he refused to employ an attorney, and treated with scant courtesy the one assigned him by the judge. He betrayed irritation at the slow dragging of the case as the prosecution piled up its evidence against him. His whole manner indicated that he wished the trial to end as soon as possible and hoped for a verdict of guilty.

This incomprehensible behavior placed the voting and ambitious attorney on his mettle. He realized that some inexplicable mystery lay behind the matter, and this sharpened his zeal to find it. He plied his client with all manner of questions, and tried in all way to secure his confidence:

Ross remained sullen, morose, and wholly given over to despairing resignation. The young lawyer had made a wonderful discovery, which he at first felt confident would clear the prisoner, but any mention of it to Ross would only throw him into a violent passion and cause him to tremble as with a palsy. His conduct on such occasions was terrible beyond measure. He seemed utterly

beside himself, and thus his attorney had become convinced of the man's insanity. The trouble in proving it was that he dared not mention his discovery to others, and that Ross exhibited no signs of mania unless that one subject was broached.

The prosecution made out a case that looked impregnable, and this fact seemed to fill the prisoner with peace. The young lawyer for the defence had summoned a number of witnesses, but in the end he used only one. His opening statement to the jury was merely that it was a physical impossibility for the prisoner to have committed the murder,--which was done by choking. Ross made a frantic attempt to stop him from putting forth that defence, and from the dock wildly denounced it as a lie.

The young lawyer nevertheless proceeded with what he deemed his duty to his unwilling client. He called a photographer and had him produce a large picture of the murdered man's face and neck. He proved that the protrait was that of the person whom Ross was charged with having killed. As he approached the climax of the scene, Ross became entirety ungovernable in his frantic efforts to stop the introduction of the evidence, and so it became necessary to bind and gag him and strap him to the chair.

When quiet was restored, the lawyer handed the photograph to the jury and quietly remarked:

"You may see for yourselves that the choking was done with the left hand, and you have observed that my client has no such member."

He was unmistakably right. The imprint of the thumb and fingers, forced into the flesh in a singularly ferocious, sprawling, and awkward manner, was shown in the photograph with absolute clearness. The prosecution, taken wholly by surprise, blustered and made attempts to assail the evidence, but without success. The jury returned a verdict of not guilty.

Meanwhile the prisoner had fainted, and his gag and bonds had been removed; but he recovered at the moment when the verdict was announced. He staggered to his feet, and his eyes rolled; then with a thick tongue he exclaimed:

"It was the left arm that did it! This one"— holding his right arm as high as he could reach— "never made a mistake. It was always the left one. A spirit of mischief and murder was in it. I cut it off in a saw-mill, but the spirit stayed where the arm used to be, and it choked this man to death. I didn't want you to acquit me. I wanted you to hang me. I can't go through life having this thing haunting me and spoiling my business and making a murderer of me. It tries to choke me while I sleep. There it is! Can't you see it?" And he looked with wide-staring eves at his left side.

"Mr. Sheriff," gravely said the judge, "take this man before the Commissioners of Lunacy tomorrow."

22: A Cup of Cold Water

Ernest Favenc

1845-1908

In: *The Last of Six: Tales of the Austral Tropics*, 1894

A SILENT and gloomy man. For a man of wealth, who, at one time, had been noted for his social qualities and his hospitality, Marten was looked upon with some little wonder by those who lived in his neighbourhood. People spoke of his solitary habits and the frightened, hunted look he always had in his eyes. Rumour even said that that stalwart and attentive man-servant of his was, in reality, a keeper.

Marten was a man whom vengeance had overtaken in this world and he could never forget it.

DULL, dark scrub all around, a sandy, barren soil underfoot, a cloudless sky and a hot, relentless sun overhead. Even more desolate than the usual dreary-looking scrub of the interior of Australia is this lonely thicket. The trunks of the stunted trees are gnarled and crooked, the foliage is scant and almost shadeless, the ground absolutely free from all undergrowth, and a deep, lifeless quiet reigns throughout. Footsteps and laboured breathing; and the repose of the scene is broken by the appearance of a human figure, a worn and wearied man slowly and painfully dragging himself along some horse-tracks forming a trail through the scrub. The unfortunate traveller is a pitiable sight, his sun-scorched face is thin and haggard with starvation, and his bloodshot eyes gleam with the delirium of thirst, his boots are absolutely ragged, and he leaves a bloody track on the baked ground. At times he sinks beneath the mockery of shade thrown by one of the scrub-trees, then, after a brief rest, renews his toilsome way.

Presently a break is visible ahead, and with restored hope the exhausted man pushes on, and ere long, with a hoarse, inarticulate cry of joy, emerges from the scrub on to the bank of a river. A river such as had haunted his dreams— clear, bright, sparkling, splashing in tiny rivulets amongst granite boulders, and rippling from one wide pool to another.

But the river has a strange appearance— no trees line its banks, no rushes fringe its shore, the bed is like a broad channel cut through the sandy waste around; down the centre runs the stream of water, the sight of which has brought fresh life to the worn-out wanderer. Slowly he toils across the hot and heavy sand to one of the shallow pools that sparkle in the sunlight, flings himself down and plunges his burning face and cracked lips into the crystal stream, then raises his head quickly with a bitter cry of pain— for this delusive, mocking river is salter than the sea.

The first moments of despair passed, the traveller gathers himself together again for a struggle to the last, retraces his steps to the bank and searches for the continuation of the horse-tracks he has been following. Finding these, he once more plunges into the sea of scrub that lines either bank of the river, and slowly staggers on. Three hours have passed and the sun is getting low when there is again a break in the weary, monotonous thicket— a small, comparatively clear patch of country, in the centre of which rises a conical hill of bare granite rock, lifting its bald crest and smooth, glistening sides nearly a hundred feet above the expanse of sad-coloured tree-tops. The open space encircling the foot of the rock is covered with short grass, there are several clumps of cork-trees scattered about, and in a deep depression at the base of the hill is one of the rock-holes peculiar to Western Australia, nearly half full of rain-water— a deep hole almost like a tank hollowed out by human hands.

Refreshed by a long drink, the man eagerly surveys the signs of a late encampment. He thrusts his hand into the ashes of the fire, but they are cold. He searches anxiously for any scraps of food that may have been left behind, but without avail. Then another hope comes to him, and with his last remaining strength he climbs the side of the naked rock and stands upright on the summit gazing around.

A terribly depressing panorama meets his view, lit up by the last rays of the declining sun. North, south and east is a grim, black expanse of scrub without opening, save that here and there he can recognise the sheen of the treacherous saltwater river. As far as eye can see stretches this lonely, lifeless waste, that owns no boundary save the blue haze of the horizon. He then turns to the west. The same stern uniformity, the only difference being that a dark-blue, square-topped range is visible far off. No smoke arises anywhere, neither break nor clearing is visible; all is silent, merciless and dead. With one last, despairing look he recognises that the great wilderness has pronounced his doom, and, with hopeless step, descends to the rocky hole and throws himself down to await the coming of his last and only friend.

Darkness sets in; the clear stars shine bright in a moonless sky, one by one the southern constellations sink lower and lower until they are swallowed up in the black shadow of the gloomy scrub. The distant whoop of an owl, or the melancholy wail of some other night-bird alone breaks the oppressive stillness, but the sleeper heeds them not. Nature has been kind to him at last and brought him painless slumber. In pleasant dreams his mind wanders far away from the foot of the giant rock where his body rests. The grey dawn finds him still alive, but the bitterness of death has passed, he neither cares nor thinks of rescue or relief; the encircling desert has lost its terrors, he is half-way to another world. Still there is something to be done, and he takes a loose bit of stone, and drags himself alongside a flat rock which is covered with rude

markings, the work of the aborigines: imitations of the tracks of kangaroos and emus, the trails of serpents and lizards, and, keeping guard over all, a gigantic human track with six toes, the mystic footprint of the aboriginal devil.

Amongst these savage emblems the dying man scrawls his name and the date; that done, he feels that his earthly cares are over. He thrusts his hand inside his shirt as though to grasp some object there with loving care, and with a sigh of relief his head falls back and he thinks no more of heat or thirst or hunger, for Death, the comforter, has brought him full release.

FOUR MONTHS have passed, the weather has been unchanged. Day after day a cloudless sun has looked down on the lonely body, gradually shrivelling up into a withered mummy: day after day has seen it untouched by bird or beast; even the scavenger crows have shunned the spot, and the dead white man has lain in solitude all the time. Two men are now standing by the remains, horses are feeding around on the dry grass, and two black boys are kindling a fire a short distance away. One of the men, a young fellow of about three-and-twenty, kneels down and reverently takes from the fleshless hand the object it has held so long in the clutch of death— a worn and weather-stained note-book. Rising, he calls to one of the blacks to bring a blanket, which he throws over the body, and the two go silently to their camp.

"Tom," says the young man, "we have found what we started to look for sooner than I expected. God help Marten when I meet him!"

"The black boy's yarn must have been right," returned Tom.

"True as Gospel. Over a hundred and fifty miles he must have come in on foot, starving, and for every mile my father trod to meet his death here on this rock, the murdering cur who left him out there to die shall suffer bitterly in return, or my name's not Manning. Now, let us see what he has written."

The message of the dead man to his son was short, but pregnant. It ran:—

"While I was away from camp Marten packed up, and taking all the horses and the two boys, started home. I came back with my horse knocked up and sore-footed and found the camp deserted. We discovered some splendid country on the heads of the G— and the L— , and I think he means to go down and take it up for himself, trusting to my never turning up again. I must follow on foot as best I can, for my horse is dead lame. ... I have been walking now for two days and my feet are cut to pieces on the ranges; perhaps when I get down on the level country I may get along better. ... Quite knocked up; I have done my best but can hold out no longer; if anyone finds this let them take it and the note to my son, John Manning, Ballarat, Victoria."

Between the leaves was one, torn out and folded note-shape. It ran:—

"DEAR JACK,— Marten left me to die of starvation at the head of the L— — River. I have struggled along so far, but must lie down and die here. God bless you, my boy."

There was silence after reading this. Tom broke it first.

"Marten sold the country well, didn't he?"

"Yes, almost immediately he got back, there was a bit of a craze for country just then."

"But for that nigger we'd never have dropped on the rights of it."

"No, Marten supposed that the two boys would go back to their country— never dreamt that I would come over here on a forlorn hope of finding my father and run across one of them. He said, too, that he found the good country after my father was lost, so that I had no share in the proceeds of the sale."

"Shall we bury him now?" said Tom at last, after a pause.

Young Manning nodded, and they proceeded with their task. By sundown the long-neglected body, that had lain unwatched on the desolate rock, was consigned to the earth, and, next morning, the son set himself the labour of carving out in more permanent characters the name of the man who rested there.

"Tom," said Manning, when his work was done, "I have made up my mind how to act, and I want you to keep quiet about my father's death. I intend giving that fellow rope enough and coming down on him when he least expects it. It would be impossible to sheet this home to him by law, so I shall use other means. I can trust you, I know."

"About the boys?" returned Tom.

"We'll discharge them before we get back to town, and it's not likely Marten will ever run against any of them again."

In an hour's time the rock mound and the new-made grave were as lonely as before.

JAMES H. Marten, Esq., was a rich man, the few thousands he had made out of pastoral country in the western colony had been well invested in mining shares, and he had been one of the few who had made money by a mining-boom. He still dabbled in it, although there was no necessity for him doing so, but the fever was yet in his veins, and the fascination of a new reef had all its old attraction for him. At the present time he had, as he thought, "a big thing on" in Kimberley[*]— he had just had a satisfactory interview with a man who showed him specimens "rich enough to boom any company along until the bottom dropped out of it." Marten had half a mind to go up north and look at it himself; he was getting too stout, he thought, and a good rough trip would set him up again— why, he'd been leading a sedentary life ever since that trip with Manning. And as the thought came back to him he picked up his hat and went

out hastily, for he felt as though there was something strange locked up in the office with him.

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[Kimberley, in North Western Australia.]*

Thus affected by nervous fears, due, as he thought, to inertia, Marten, after some hesitation, finally decided on the Kimberley trip, and, in company with the prospector who had brought him the specimens, whose name was Tom Howard, started for the North. The camp where the reef was situated was one of the furthest outlying ones, and by the time they reached it Marten felt that he was rapidly getting back to hard condition again. Nearly a week passed, and the mining magnate was quite satisfied that he had a most profitable speculation, whatever the public might find it in the end, when there was a new arrival in the camp— a friend of the prospector's, who had been on a long trip southward. After some mysterious conferences, Marten was taken into confidence and shown specimens that made his mouth water. The man who brought them into camp had found them nearly one hundred and fifty miles to the south-west; there was a patch of desert country to cross, but that was nothing with such a lure ahead. Marten, who now felt in his old bush form, consented to go with the stranger and look at the new find so that he could make a personal report in Melbourne, and they started.

Marten found his new companion taciturn and reserved; he would take his meals apart in solitary fashion, and sleep some distance off. Marten had seen the same moodiness before in men who had long lived an "outside" life, and he thought nothing of it— the more stupid the man, the better for him. Strange schemes intruded themselves into his brain of playing his companion the trick he had played Manning, if the reef turned out anything like the specimens that had been produced. If Fortune dealt trumps in his hand why should he not take advantage of them? Their way was a weary one, some of it across sandy spinifex plains, and part of it through mulga— only twice did they come to any water, in each instance a brackish native well. On the fourth day they reached rough, broken country, and his companion pointed to a range and said that the reef was there. That night they camped at a small rock-hole which just sufficed for their wants and those of their horses. Next morning the prospector said they must leave their spare horses and ride on, look at the reef, and come back, as there was no water beyond this place.

After about three hours' ride they halted at the foot of a frowning range from which some deep ravines ran down into the lower country. Here the prospector pulled up. "We had better," he said, "tie our horses to this tree and go up the gully on foot— it's too rough for horses." They dismounted. "I am not quite sure which of the two gullies it is— they are both so much alike; you go up

this one and I'll go up the other. If you see anything of my old tracks fire your revolver; if not, come back here and wait for me."

They parted, and Marten made an unsuccessful ascent of the gully. There were no tracks nor any signs of auriferous country, and tired, thirsty, and disgusted, he returned to the rendevous.

The horses were gone! Was it possible he had made a mistake? No; there were the tracks. Had they broken their bridles and made off? A distant noise drew his attention to a ridge about half-a-mile away. There was the prospector riding homewards, leading Marten's horse. Marten yelled and "coo-eed" without attracting any attention; then he drew his revolver to fire a shot, but an empty click was the only response. He looked at it; the cartridges had been removed. There was no doubt he was being purposely left behind. As this thought flashed through his mind, the receding man pulled up on the crest of the ridge and looked back. Taking off his hat, he waved a mocking salute, and then vanished down the far side.

With all the terror that now crowded into Marten's brain there was one predominant question— what was the motive for deserting him? Then a cold shiver ran through him. Had Manning come to life after all and paid someone to play him this trick? He rallied himself and started to follow the track of the horses. It was evident no one would come back for him; he must help himself. It was dark when he got to the rock-hole where they had camped the night before, and, although he knew that it could not be otherwise, yet it was with horror he noticed that the place was deserted, packs, horses, everything gone. There was a little muddy water at the bottom of the hole, and he drank it greedily. He passed an awful night, the mysterious suddenness of the blow overwhelmed him. If he had had a chance to argue or explain it would have been different, but all around him was silence and the desert. "Plead to that!" a mocking voice seemed to say.

Next morning at grey dawn he was off along the back track, and doggedly pursued his way until the loose sand and spinifex compelled him to seek rest. He had no water-bag, so he had thrown his useless revolver away and filled the pouch with some of the muddy water, perhaps he could struggle through to the second native well— but 60 miles!— it was a long way. That night was passed in the slumber of exhaustion; next morning, with stiffened limbs, he recommenced his march, and now his watersupply was exhausted. Noontide found him lying under a mulga-bush, praying for death. The sound of an approaching horse aroused him; the prospector had repented and turned back. He halted near the exhausted man, and, leaning on his horse's neck looked calmly at him. "Do you know who I am?" he said. "I am Jack Manning, the son of the man you murdered. I have brought you out here to die the same death you condemned him to. I know everything, I found his dead body, his note-book, and a letter to

me, I also found one of the boys you had with you. My father followed you nearly one hundred and fifty miles, then he died of hunger and exhaustion; I intend you to do the same, and also to have the pleasure of watching you do it. I have no intention of letting you die just yet, so I will give you a quart of water and you must make that do until you reach the second well." Manning dismounted, filled his quart-pot from the water-bag he was carrying and placed it on the ground, when, just as he was riding off, the wretched man broke the spell of shameful silence that held him and begged and implored mercy. It was useless. As though stone-deaf, Manning rode away and left him to plead to the sand, the mulga, and the spinifex; once more the silence and horror of the desert were around him.

On the fourth day, in a state of delirium, he staggered to the native well and buried his face in the tepid, brackish water. His enemy was not visible. Should he wait here for death? He fell unconscious while thinking.

When he awoke it was morning, and he thought he would make the attempt to reach the other well; perhaps his foe would relent. He staggered wearily on, and when the day grew hot sank down at the foot of a sand-ridge.

"Do you repent?" said a voice. Manning was standing over him. His swollen tongue refused to answer, but he feebly raised his hand. "Drink," said his enemy: "I cannot see even you die of thirst."

With all the fierce longing burning within him for the sweet, cool draught, he yet thought that it were better to die now than live to undergo it all once more, and, with a last effort, he put the proffered bag aside. "Let me die," he groaned in a scarcely audible voice. "Drink," said the other, "I will spare your life, though I cannot forgive; drink, and repent."

He held the mouth of the bag to his enemy's lips and moistened them. The touch of the cool water was too much; with a feverish grasp the half-dead man seized the bag and drank greedily. Then, with a wild laugh, he fell back insensible.

"Is it too late, I wonder?" thought Manning, looking at him. It was not too late for his life; but his reason never quite recovered. Ever since he has been haunted by the nightmare of that dreadful tramp through the waterless desert, with the avenger ever dogging his footsteps.

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23: Irony De Luxe

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

The Daily Telegraph (Sydney) 26 April 1937

MAYBE YOU'VE met a man like Morton. There are so very many like him in this world. Some Mortons are big. Some are small. Some are stout. Some are thin. There are Mortons in every village and every city in every part of the world.

Consider, then, this man of whom I write. They never gave him a chance in life. Better for him if he had never been born at all. He didn't ask to come— and when he arrived, nobody asked him to stay. His mother might have been kind to him, but Morton didn't know about that. She died before he was old enough to realise what kindness was.

This child reached the age of seven in an environment that would bring shivers to the most hardened of us all. A weak boy, the world was a terrifying thing to him at a very early age. It was Morton's father, more than anyone else, who turned the child into the sad character he became. For the old man had never been anything but a poverty-stricken drunkard.

How he managed to pay his meagre rent and bring home a loaf of bread for Morton now and then nobody seemed to know.

The father came home one night even drunker than usual. The boy sat in a corner and watched him. The old man staggered to a window and throw it open. He fell through the window to the street below. And his life ended in a sickening thud. The following day, they put Morton in a big house with a lot of other boys and girls. Orphans were what they called them.

Most of us learn with age. Experience is just another name for past mistakes. What we do at twenty we laugh at when we're thirty. When we're forty we laugh at our mistakes at thirty. And when we're fifty, we wish we were back at twenty and making the same mistakes.

Basically, of course, Morton was no different from the next man. As the years flew by he learned many things.

He was able to forget many things, too. Practically everything, in fact— except the one thing he should have tossed from his mind— his father's death and horrible burial.

It finally became something of an obsession with the boy. He swore to himself that he would never end that way. That determination shaped his entire life. While the other boys were dreaming of adventure and planning great

careers, Morton was looking for something that would give him enough to live on— and sufficient to die on.

One morning the had made up his mind. He picked a field in which his pay would advance with the years. He chose a type of work that would enable him to retire after so many years on the job. He picked one of the most underpaid and underestimated branches in the United States Government service. He became a letter carrier in the city of New York.

Tough job, that is. Very few people understand the work. In a city such as this, we accept the mailman as a matter of course. Lugging that heavy sack around, day after day and year after year. Walking the miles away— and getting no further than when they started. Carrying the secrets of the world— and never knowing what those secrets are. Plodding on so that they might eat and buy shoes that will enable them to plod on just a little longer. That was Morton.

But Morton didn't work at it as you or I might do. He was happy. As happy, that is, as he could ever be. He was working toward a goal. And each letter he delivered, each sack that he strapped on his shoulder, brought him just a little closer toward that goal.

But why go on along these lines?

Let me skip the years as only a hurrying columnist can do, and bring Morton to more recent times. Let me bring him to the greatest day of his life. He was about to be retired on a pension. He had never married. In the bank was the money he had been saving for years. Not much— as we think of money these days. But enough for the Morton of this story. With the pension that was to be his in a day or two, he knew he could live in peace— and die in peace. Very few millionaires can make the same boast.

A few of the boys gave him a little blowout in a restaurant near his post-office. About fifteen of them got together, and chipped in. Plenty of beer. Lots of sandwiches. Hard stuff for those who wanted it. Dancing with the proprietor's wife if you behaved yourself. Speeches.

They called on Morton. Good old Morton. He had drunk a lot of beer that night. With the boys. Almost over now. Why not?

He got up. He tried to talk. Suddenly the tears coursed from his eyes.

"Gee, fellers," he muttered, "I— I can't say nothin'. All I can say, fellers, is that— that, gee, I'm awful happy."

Soon it was time to leave. Morton went out alone first. Just to get a little air. He took a deep breath. His head felt strange. Going around. All topsy-turvy. He grinned. Silly for him to be that way. Drunk, of course.

He took a step. Another. Still another. A horn. A muttered curse. A shrill grinding of brakes. A dull, muffled sound. The driver of the truck leaped out and began to tug at the prostrate form in the rear. The crowd came from all sides.

A little later, the ambulance arrived. Much too late. It wasn't the truck-driver's fault at all, of course. The doctor said the man had died instantly. And perhaps it was just as well that Morton never lived to see that truck.

For on the sides were these three ironic words:—

"United States Mail."

24: The Miller of Ostend

Melville Davisson Post

1869-1930

Adelaide Journal, 19 Dec 1914

AN OLD man pushing a two-wheeled cart, under which a short-eared grey dog pulled, stopped in the narrow street behind the Digue de Mer. The shops of Ostend were nearly deserted, few besides the baker and the tobacconist remained. And in those the women sold. Every man in Belgium had his breast against the Prussian column. The old miller, out yonder on the road toward Brussels, ground a little wheat and peddled it about slowly over the cobble stones, for the dog, like his master, was old.

The shop before which the miller stopped had a few cans of English pipe tobacco piled up in the window. The English marines had finally landed after the long days of deadly waiting. Ostend was changed as by some sorcery. This, the gayest city in Europe, was now the most deserted. The marines patrolled the Digne de Mer, the railway station, and the road. A great Red Cross flag floated over the Kursaal, the fantastic temple to Change that Leopold had built to turn the emigration toward Monaco northward. The kings of the earth were at a deadlier game than trente-et-quarante and the new queen had taken this house of Fortune in which to store the broken pawns. The old man pounded as the door of the shop and called out in a sort of patois, a bastard kind of Flemish French.

For some moments was no response. Then suddenly the door flew open. The old miller was caught in two young arms, hugged, and pushed out into the street. The sunny thing that came like a butterfly out of the dingy shop scolded and kissed the miller, then stood back against the window and bade him admire her white cap and her English muslin skirt and the Red Cross on her arm. She was going to help the Queen in the great Kursaal. The materials had been sent by the rich English ladies overseas, but she had put in every stitch herself. Was it not all beautifully done? The Queen would not be shamed by her. Was he not proud of such a granddaughter?

He was proud, but emotion in him dwelt in the subterranean places from whence it did not issue. but in which its strength forever remained. His son Albert was dead at Leige, he knew, but he did not tell her. Her mother she had never known. She had no one in the world now but himself. He rubbed his stubble beard with his broad, flat fingers. He had given one to the King— well, the one to be given now to the Queen would at least be a no danger. Even the Prussians did not wage war on women.

"The Queen not apt to look at the grand daughter of a miller," he said.

"But she looked, grand-pere," cried the girl, "and she said I was La Belle Marie. Who was La Belle Marie, grand-pere?"

"A woman in a song," said old man, and he looked down, for the woman in the song had wept for for the dead.

But the girl had not waited for his answer. She thrust a big iron key in the lock of the door, gave it a twist with her supple hand and flung the key into the cart.

"Adieu, grand pere," she cried. "The gand daughter of a miller can at least be on the hour. Come to the Kursaal tomorrow!"

She paused and blew back kisses.

"And ask the Queen for La Belle Marie. "

Her laugh rippled like a silver banner in the sun.

The old man stood and watched her disappear up the narrow cobbled street toward the Digne de Mer. Her slender, supple body was full of the joy of life. The sun seemed entangled in her hair. Thank God, the Prussian did not wage a war on women.

He spoke to the dog, and taking hold of the cart they went out toward the Brussels rood. As they passed the Cathedral, with its three holy figures indented in the ancient, wall, a priest came out and crossed before them. The miller stopped and spoke to the priest.

"Father," he said, "is the Pope dead as I have heard?"

The priest turned about. He, too, was an old man, his face worn almost ghastly with fatigue.

"My son," be said, "the hosts of Satan have seized the world, and the good God has withdrawn his ambassador... It is fate. The Holy Father is dead." And gathering up his skirts he set out toward the peasant houses in the environs of Ostend where the wounded sent back from the front needed his assistance.

The old man and the dog travelled out of Ostend and along the Brussels road. They travelled slowly. A peasant passed, driving a flock of geese into the city. He was a figure in every detail out of a picture in a fairy book. He wore a long smock, wooden shoes, and a curious hat. He had a round expressionless face, and he carried a crook for catching the geese about the neck when they endeavoured to leave the road. But for all his wooden expression the peasant was no Simple Simps.

"Hey, Peevel Beever," he said, "if you come with me you can learn the German goose-step— that gander in the front was born in Prussia." And be laughed.

"You ought to be with the king," said the old man. The peasant's face changed.

"I do the king a better service with the geese," he said.

And it was true. He went out, always to be robbed by the German camps and to count the guns. A troop of cavalry passed. The old man drew his cart out of the road.

Then he went on. Presently they came to a little ancient house surrounded by a wide empty ditch. They entered. The miller unharnessed the dog, fed him some pieces of bread, and sat down on the door step. Evening advanced. The wind from the sea died down, the whole world under the setting sun seemd a land of quiet and unending peacefulless. The serenity of heaven seemed to extend everywhere like a benediction.

Presently, far away toward Brussels, a thing like a wingless goose appeared in the sky. It travelled at great speed and soon took form and outline. It came on like a projectile toward Ostend, One could distinguish now its long aluminium cylinder and the strange equipment of the Zeppelin, painted gray like a warship. While one stood to count his fingers this grim engine of the air was over the city.

There was a long, dull roar, and the glass-enclosed terrace of the Kursaal that bowed out toward the promenade of Leopold south along the Digne de Mer flew into a cloud of dust and broken tiles. Meanwhile, as though signalled of the approach of the Zeppelin, an English submarine arose like some fabled sea-thing out of the slime of the harbour. A figure emerged from the turret, seized a lever, and a gun that was folded into the back of the monster swung up into place, other figures appeared, and the gun, lifting perpendicular opened fire on the dirigible. The gunner missed. The Zeppelin swung round in the great arc of a circle and started to return. The gun cackled, but the gunner, either from lack of skill or the oscillation of the submarine, continued to miss.

Finally, the Zeppelin, driving dead away toward Brussels was seen suddenly to list, it hung for a moment half balanced ever, then it glided slowly down. A shot travelling parallel with the cylinder had ripped open the gas compartments along the whole side, as the water-tight compartments of a liner one ripped open by the North Atlantic ice. It did not fall— the gas chambers on the other side of the long aluminium envelope were enough to prevent that; but not enough to hold it in the air, and listing heavily it descended slowly into the fields.

The detachment of Belgian cavalry riding the town raced toward it. At the dull boom of the first explosion the old miller, sitting on his door step, arose and started to return to Ostend. He swung forward with great strides, slouching his left shoulder, since he was accustomed to carry a sack of grain. He had the terrible stiffened celerity of the aged when they are in a desperate way. He knew the city, and the direction of the sound located for him where the deadly thing had struck.

His awful fear was justified. Under the. wrecked glass of the Kursaal, among the scattered cots and the wounded— now mangled— dead men, a little broken

thing, with a red cross stitched to her sleeve and the sun still nestling in her hair, lay motionless across the sill of a door.

Poor Belle Marie, unlike the woman in the song, would never weep for the dead.

In spite of the fact that the Zeppelin seemed to float down eassily to the earth, the landing wrecked, it. The great cylinder nosed into a ditch; the platforms were broken and the crew thrown out. They were not able to make any resistance to the Belgian cavalry. The uninjured ran about and were presently rounded up by the horsemen; one or two firing with small arms were shot.

When the Belgian officer came to look at the wounded he did not know what to do. Night was descending and he must get his detachment into Ostend. He had no surgeon in his troop and no way to carry wounded. He ordered a rough shelter put up out of the wreckage of the Zeppelin, and laid the wounded men and the dead on blankets under it.

For himself, he must get to saddle and into Ostend. The gooseherd travelling out of Brussels had brought news that could not wait. He had only a handful of troopers. When he came to mount the uninjured prisoners— each behind a cavalryman— he found that he could not spare a man to remain with the wounded. He stood a moment with his hand gathering up his bridle rein, when, by chance, the problem solved itself. The old priest, crossing the fields on his errand of mercy from cottage to cottage, appeared. The officer commandeered him.

"Father," he said, "remain here and take care of these men until the authorities at Ostend can bring them in." Then he got into the saddle and clattered away, riding at a gallop and taking the ditches as though he followed an English fox. The prisoners, strapped to the cavalrymen, bounded about like great loose lumps tied to the saddles.

Night was coming on.

The priest began at once to attend the wounded. The Belgian officer had given him a canteen— a flat metal bottle covered with canvas and filled with water. Near him lay the officer of the Zeppelin, unconscious. Now he began to groan. The priest put the bottle to his lips. After a little the man drank, then sighed deeply, like one returning to consciousness. He made one or two vague enquiries, then seemed all at once to understand what had happened. He asked the priest to look in the wreckage of the Zeppelin for a lantern and in the pocket of his coat for a box of matches The old man went away to look, and the German spoke to his companions, feebly asking their names and how badly they were injured. Only one or two of them replied, and he called out to the priest, telling him where to look for tne lantern and bidding him strike the matches and

be guided by certain portions of the platform that he indicated. Presently the old man returned with the lantern.

The darkness was now dense and there was no wind. The lantern burned steadily. The German officer seemed again unconscious. He lay relaxed, and with the lantern in his hand the old man began to examine the wounded, from man to man. Three of the crew of the Zeppelin were dead, and of the other five one was dying. The priest attempted to arrange the blanket under the dying man's head, but ceased to breathe almost immediately.

The four men remaining were not mortally hurt, and the priest endeavoured to make them as comfortable as he could. It was impossible to realize that only an hour ago these persons were the active agents of a devastating madness. They were concerned now only with the little human things that occupy the energies of sick men. The German oflicer. who had a crushed thigh, asked tbe priest to help him write a note to his family in Breslau. He did not seem to realize that no letter could cross the frontier. He said there was a writing pad with paper and pencil in a pocket under aim. The priest explored the pocket, put tbe pencil into the man's finders, and steadying the writing pad with one hand held the lantern where the flame would light it. But the officer tried in vain to write. The shock of the injury made his hand shake and he scratched only unintelligible marks on the paper. The priest promised to carry his message to Breslau when the war was over, and asked the man what he wished to say. "Tell them I got hurt," the officer replied with the impressive brevity of sick men.

Another of the wounded— a youth from Hesse—had known an English student at Giessen. And with an utter disregard of probabilities the German thought this man might now be among the English marines at Ostend. He would be a surgeon, and, if the priest conuld find him, the boy was sure all the wounded would be put into a hospital and kindly treated. The Englishman would remember who had taken him to see the student duels, and had got him permission to make some experiments in a professor's laboratory. The boy went on to say what the experiments were, and how pleasant a person the Englishman was, and so forth.

Only one of the men acted like the soldier in the hero tales. His legs were broken. And after the priest had made him as comfortable as he could on the the bedding from the Zeppelin began to tell of a little clock off a cruiser that the English Fleet had sunk in the North. The face of the clock had broken and one of the handles shot off, but it continued to run, ticking away with one hand going. Among all of the events of the war this thing alone impressed him.

"That was a good German clock," he said. "That's what it to be 'made in Germany.' " And he tried to inspire the priest with enthusiasm for the little shattered clock that continued to run.. But even the example of the brave clock or the sinking cruiser did not bring the wounded man any strength to go on like

it. He suffered intensely, and he was wholly unable to emulate the example he cherished.

When the priest had done all he could he sat down by the German officer and opened a little old leather book printed in Latin. He began to read it by the lantern, now and then closing his eyes and repeating something—either of what he read or something which the printed words called up.

The night deepened. The temperature began to change. A slight mist arose and a breath of wind. The grass and the blankets became damp. The priest gut up now and then to visit the wounded men, to give them water, to smooth the blankets beneath them, and to change the posture of their injured bodies. Then he returned to his place besde the officer and to his book, the lantern held close to the the page.

At midnight a figure emerged from the darkness. The priest got up, keeping his place in his book with his finger.

"Peever Beever!" he said, when he was finally able to make out who it was. And the wounded German saw an old stupid peasant, wearing a blouse dirty with grain meal, come into the light.

The miller seemed embarrased and uncertain.

He uttered an expression in Flemish, inflected like an expletive, "Eh, Father. Bless my soul, it's you!"

"Did you come to search for me?" said the priest, his voice showing some anxiety. The peasant lied convincingly. "Maximilianus Storm," he said; "you know Maximilianus Storm. He sent me."

"Is he worse?" said the priest. "He was better this morning."

"Eh, yes..." replied the old man; "that it is. He's sick— bad sick." Then he added— "His woman sent me." The priest seemed for a moment to reflect. Then he spoke to the miller.

"Peever Beever," he said, "take this lantern and wait here until I come back." He advanced and put the lantern into the miller's hand. "Obey me!" he continued. "I will return in an hour."

The old man took the lantern and sat down.

"It's Maximilianus Storm," he repeated; "you know Maximilianus Storm.... His woman..."

"Yes," replied the priest, "I know; do as I have told you."

And he set out in a certain definite direction as precisely as though he travelled in the sun. In spite of his deliberate promise the priest was hardly gone before the old man got up and came steadily toward the prisoners. He came softly, stooped over. In his left hand he carried the lantern, and in his right, held against his blouse, something which could not be seen. The German officer knew the sort of treatment that the wounded were reported to receive at the hands of the peasants of Belgium, and he expected some outrage. But instead of

any injury something was thrust into his face, and by the light of the lantern he saw a little cross of red muslin....

The ripped-out stitches he did not see, nor the dried bloodstain coloured like the cross. The German could not understand what the peasant said. His conversation with the priest had been in French, but this was too much alloyed with Flemish.

The wounded man was profoundly astonished, for he expected some brutality, and he spoke to his companions, explaining what the peasant carried in his hand. The old miller went from man to man, thrusting the candle and the bit of muslin into every face and repeating his incomrehensible words. Then be came back, fastened the lantern against the side of the rude shelter, and stooped over to lift up the German officer. This man asked him what he was about to do, but the miller did not reply; and the man concluded that the priest had gone to arrange some shelter to which this peasant was to remove them. The miller shouldered the wounded man as though he were a bag of grain and set out into the darkness. He travelled for some time over grass, for his wooden shoes made no sound; then he crossed a ditch and called out as to one waiting for his arrival. A dog whined, and the prisoner made out a cart standing by the side of the road. The miller put his load into the cart. He took hold of the little round bar behind it, and, speaking to the dog, the strange convoy began its journey.

It was intensely dark. But the aspect of the night was beginning to change. The wind was coming up from the sea—gently, but with, the promise of a steady breeze.

The wounded man in the cart was profoundly puzzled. Could the peasant be in the service of the emblem he carried? Could the authorities at Ostend have sent out a person like this and for transportation a cart drawn by a dog? It seemed not likely. And yet this was perhaps the only vehicle remaining from the war, and an army so hard pressed could have only men like this and women to care for the wounded. Besides, the priest had gone away at once, leaving this man is charge. Would the priest have abandoned his commission thus readily to one coming without authority? And the sick man laboured to recall the bastard words and phrases that the priest and the peasant had spoken, in a hope that he could puzzle out their meanmg. But be could not.

The cart jolted along the silent road. He couid hear only the soft padding of the dnz straining under him and the shuffle of the peasant's wooden shoes. He spoke, endeavouring by a nice enunciation of each word to make the old man understand him.

"Where do you go?" he said. The peasant stopped, and, speaking in a like manner, carefully repied in a sort of French. There were Flemish words in it, and

all that the German could make out was that the crew of the Zeppelin was to be returned to the sky.

Presently the cart stopped. The peasant took up the prisoner, entering what seemed to be a swinging gate, crossed a bit of turf, paused before a door, unlatched it, put his burden inside and, fastening the door behind him, returned to the cart.

With a profound relief the wounded man now understood what the pedant was about. The wind was coming up, and perhaps with it rain. The authorities of the Red Cross had sent this man with the cart to bring the wounded prisoners under the shelter of a roof. The old peasant could bring but one at a time. He had gone back for another. And the pain-racked man, no longer making any mental effort, lay in a sort of coma...

The old peasant presently returned with another of the wounded. And so continued his journeys until the four living men had been brought into the house. The he did not disturb, nor did he bring a blanket or any article from the wreckage. The four men lay on the dirt floor— side by side in the darkness. The door stood open. The night teemed thick and dense. The wind had come up steadily. The old peasant had gone out, and now the men on the floor heard noises as though heavy timbers were being slowly moved about. The sound went on for some time. Then all at once the old peasant appeared in the door, took up the last man whom he had brought in, and, slinging him on his shoulder as though he were a bag of wheat, carried him away.

The wounded officer was now alarmed. What thing was this inscrutable peasant about? Once before on this night he had been mistaken in the creature's intent. And the sense of disaster that had seized him when the peasant first approached now returned and possessed him. He strained his ears to listen. For a time there were only slight indistinguishable sounds. Then there was a great creak, and the jar and grind of straining timbers, as though something big and unwieldy arose with dignity into the air. The old peasant returned and carried away another of the prisoners and again another, until the room was empty. And after his departure, there was always the creak and grind and strain of timber.

In an old timber windmill of the earliest Belgian type, with a tiny muslin red cross tacked on the door, a stooped peasant was grinding wheat; while lashed to the great arms in place of the canvas sails, four human bodies turned in a ghastly circle in the sky.

End