PAST MASTERS 154

Joseph Conrad
Peter Cheyney
Mark Hellinger
H. de Vere Stacpoole
Bertram Atkey
A Quiller-Couch
H Bedford-Jones

and more

PAST MASTERS 154

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 Orange Trees

H. Bedford-Jones

1887-1949

Short Stories 10 June 1942

Henry Bedford-Jones

The first of a wartime series called "This Country of Ours".

MESA and desert and mountain, sun-blistered sand and rock,
A cruel and grim horizon, a naked, barbaric land!
"Hunger and thirst and torment give birth to a fighting stock;
Here is your strength, my people! Conquer— and understand."

OF A CHILL spring afternoon, Don Diego sat hugging the sunlight on the western side of the pueblo, at the crest of the precipitous rock face. He described a moving figure, a boy running, among the piñon trees of the hill slopes against the sun. He saw other moving shapes among the trees— boys, animals, timber-cutters, all in swift motion, all heading this way. He turned and whistled shrilly. A drum took up the alarm with rapid beats. The hoarse voice of Dark Sky, governor of the pueblo, lifted in quick orders.

The pueblo, built on a high rocky outcrop along the Pecos River, hummed like a beehive. Men lugged out bows, axes, arrows to the outer walls. Nimbly the squaws and children formed water-lines, to the river eastward and to the creek westward, sending a line of pots up to the huddled structures above. The outer walls were cleared, the piles of stones and boulders were increased. The frantic haste was deft and orderly; life was at stake.

Don Diego watched it all with a soldier's appreciation. From the running boy, still afar off, came a shrill and quavering cry:

"Four strangers coming!"

Don Diego repeated the words. The hubbub died down but the work went on. Old Dark Sky clambered along to where Don Diego sat. The governor stood up against the skyline and shouted; the boy made reply. Dark Sky called to the people:

"Four strangers coming from the west; no more. Let three scouts go forth to make sure, and a runner to bring back word."

The hurried work continued, as scouts and runner started forth. Don Diego smiled and fingered the pointed beard that covered his hollow cheeks. Like these people, he too could now breathe freely once more. It was not a war-party, merely four strangers. He, too, had a life to lose, or the remnants of one.

He had been here going on two years; he, Diego Benalcasar, left among these kindly people to die, when Coronado's company reached the Pecos Valley. They had long ago gone, ebbing back into Mexico; he remained, forgotten and supposedly dead. He must die, of course; he knew this. The splendid dry, thin air of New Mexico, or San Felipe as it was then named, had bettered the crises of his lung trouble; he was brown, thin, outwardly healed by the blessed sunlight. But the coughing grew worse at times, and his lungs bled badly.

His fathers had been among the chivalry of Granada. He was not the only Moor who came to the New World with Spanish armies; but he was a Moor of pure Arab blood, white as the Spaniards themselves. It was 1540 when Coronado left him here; close to two years, he thought vaguely. He kept no count of time.

He had a new name now. They called him Ironheart, because of the cuirass he no longer wore, the first iron they had seen, It suited him ill, this quiet man of tender spirit.

The boy, still running headlong, was close beneath the height, and poured forth more information. Dark Sky turned.

"No alarm!" he called. "Four strangers, burdened; one is a woman."

He left his high perch. The pueblo fell quiet, the water-bearers ceased work, the weapons were taken under cover again. Diego sat gazing at the fields of cotton and corn, and out at the high hills of naked rock, and the dim peaks to the north his comrades had named Sangre de Cristo, because of the red sunlight on their snow at morning and night.

How he had hated this country when he came! High country of mesa and cedar and pifion tree, bleak rock stabbing the blue skies; harsh, dread country, except for the little valleys like this one. No gold, no fabled Seven Cities of Quivera; only savage raiding redskin tribes to south and west, and here the

peaceful pueblo people, unused to war, tilling the soil. A crude, barbarian land, uncivilized as its people, almost untouched by man.

Within the past few months, however, he had subtly changed about all this. Even in the primeval untouched rock and sand and cactus wilderness, there was a certain naked grandeur. And the sun held life, even more than the sun of Andalusia.

The wild game was glorious— beaver and turkey, deer and bison, small fowl abundant. A glutton would die of sheer delight, here!

Diego turned, at a scuff of moccasins on the stones. Up beside him in the warmth was clambering Isabella, daughter of the old governor. He had named her thus when first he came to this pueblo on the Pecos River, before he picked up the language.

She was an ugly woman, squat and powerful, with a quick laugh and a lively intelligence, and was the best maker of pottery in the whole place. These people who elected their own rulers were a friendly folk, with much leaning to arts and crafts.

Isabella's eyes danced at the white man. She produced a little black pot that held her only valuables, and fell to work, She was stringing the wingbones of wild turkeys into a necklace; bones saved up for years until now she had a hundred or more, graduated and beautifully rubbed into a high white polish. When finished, Diego knew that this necklace would be a veritable treasure in redskin eyes.

She called something to the approaching boy, who was her son, and laughed happily.

"He did well," said Diego. She nodded.

"So I told him. For reward, he shall be permitted to look upon the gods. Only vigilance can protect us from war-parties of Apache or Navajoa or Comanche!"

"The gods? I've never seen them," said Diego, curious.

"They are not to be shown," Isabella rejoined curtly. "Any more than your god, the one you tell us about."

"The king of all the gods," said Diego. He was no-monk; he took religion lightly, he whose fathers had prayed to Allah. But he knew these people took theirs so seriously that it entered into all their life and actions and thought, so he was grave about it. "That's why he wears a crown."

"What is a crown?" she demanded, instantly eager.

HE TRIED to make her understand. He even scratched the rude shape of a crown with his knife in the clay of her black treasure-pot.

"I see," she exclaimed. "It is his medicine. If you could look upon your god, and.inhale the smoke of the medicine fire, you would be cured. That is how we are cured, but our gods would not help you. What is your god like?"

"Oh, like a man, like me!"

"How do you know, if you have never seen him?"

The priests, the medicine men, knew; this made sense to her. Suddenly Diego laughed and reached into the pocket of his tattered jerkin.

"Ha! I found something today for you, something I brought from Mexico! I kept it because it was curious, and found it today among my things. The ancient people in Mexico made it, as you make your pots. Such things are picked up everywhere in the fields."

He handed her a little head, slightly over an inch long, of pottery. More correctly it was a face, the back of the head being quite flat. It was one of the curious little portraits in pottery found everywhere in Mexico, then and in later ages, whose use or provenance, except as portraits, have never been learned. The singular thing about this one was that it showed the face of a man with one eye, the other eye being gone in a scar.

Isabella eyed it in vast admiration, questioned him excitedly about it, and drank in all he said. She declared it must have been a god; she could not get the idea out of her head. That struck him as amusing— a one-eyed god! Evidently, the notion of a portrait in clay was new and fascinating to her. Clay-working was her business; she was an artist at it, but her work was strictly utilitarian.

So absorbed was she that she even paid no attention to what was going on. The scouts had gone forth, a runner came back. These four visitors were from another pueblo. Diego could not get the name of it; to his ears it sounded like Marcos— San Marcos, he called it. They were the last survivors of that pueblo, destroyed by the Navajoas. They sought shelter and refuge here, bringing their gods. The woman was the daughter of their dead chief.

Isabeila woke up, when the four came into sight, and Diego questioned her. That pueblo? Far away to the south and west, a journey of days and days, almost as far as Acoma. Shelter these people? No, no! If the Navajoas were in pursuit, that would be impossible; it would bring the savage Navajoas upon Pecos with fire and sword! Isabella scurried away, to join the other women in talk, taking with her as a present the little one-eyed Aztec head.

Diego, curious, went down to the creek and crossed it, to see the four refugees. That was destiny pulling at him. They were coming near, accompanied by the boys and dogs and scouts; three men who bore bundles and arms, weary, travelworn, morose with despair. And, wonder of wonders in redskin eyes, a woman lightly burdened when by rights she should have borne

the weight of all four packs! A woman tali and straight and lithe, with necklaces of shell and turquoise and stone beads; not a child, not a mother of children, but a woman fearless with youth and looking forth from brave, calm eyes. It was she who led the others.

Diego, thoughtful, had filled his waterbottle at the spring. As the four approached he stepped out and smiled, -and offered it to the woman. She drank, handed it to the others, then stared at him in startled amazement; a white man! The boys sent up a babble of talk that gave explanation. She had heard of these strange white men. She stood staring, and let the others go on; and Diego gave her look for look, himself startled by her air of nobility, by the singular beauty of her proud, fine features.

"You are welcome," he said. She understood, and smiled.

"But you are not the governor?" Her words, of a different dialect, were hard to follow at first. He caught her meaning, and was delighted. Clever woman!

"No, I am not the governor; whether he will welcome you, remains to be seen. Come, you are safe. You shall rest and eat. Does danger follow you?"

"Yes," she said simply. This was bad, he knew, for her hopes.

They went on together, overtook the others, and halted at the creek. The people of the pueblo came out to meet them, led by the governor; men and women crowding curiously at the edge of the cornfield.

THERE WAS no oratory, no idle chatter; only an avid but startled suspense and curiosity, a deep gravity. Here was an issue of life or death at decision. Everything was life or death to these people, but the Navajoas meant death, in hideous form.

The three men who had arrived laid down their burdens and talked. They told of how San Marcos, once more populous than this pueblo of Pecos, had dwindled in people and wealth until it became an empty hulk; and of how a final attack by Navajoas had been repulsed, but at frightful cost. Then sickness had come to finish the wretched folk. These four, hearing that a war-party of Navajoas were coming, fled. Then the woman spoke.

"I am Bright Sun; after I was born, the first thing my mother saw was the morning sun. My father was governor of San Marcos till he died. I have brought my people here and our gods, to ask that we may join your pueblo. We have seen Navajoa smokes behind us."

That was all; grimly eloquent, proudly significant. At her gesture, one of the three men unrolled a bundle and laid bare their gods. All three men covered their heads in shame and silence, but she remained erect and defiant.

Diego craned to see these gods. To display them thus, meant that they were desecrated and abandoned, that they were offered as a sacrifice to the strong gods of this pueblo. He saw three stones a foot long, ovals, with eyes and nose and mouth tudely fashioned at one end. Doubtless they were centuries old, sacred fetiches dating from the beginnings of the now empty and deserted pueblo.

The three men were stout fellows, well armed, versed in war; they should be a welcome addition to the hundred-odd people here, who knew little of warfare. At a gesture from Dark Sky, the three stone gods were covered again.

"If the Navajoas follow you," said the governor shrewdly, "to send you away will not save us from their blood-lust, But to take you into our company is for all the people to decide. Come and rest, drink, eat; tonight we hold council and speak with our gods."

With a rush, the refugees were made welcome, tongues chattering eagerly. Diego caught the eye of Bright Sun and held out his hand to her, and led her up the steep trail. At the crest, she paused. Now she could see over the outcrop of shaggy rock to the wide vale of the Pecos on the other side, with its trees and cultivated fields; her weary eye brightened and her tired features smoothed, and a smile touched her lips as she spoke.

"How good it is, all this country! This, and ours, and the country of the other pueblo peoples! Yet everyone who is living, must some day die—"

HE broke off, and went on with him.

Diego led her to the little stone-walled habitation that was his own; it was larger than the others, for he could not cramp himself in the tiny places where these people curled. She drank again, refused food, and dropped upon the soft deerskin; almost at once, she was asleep.

Diego unfastened her high, stout moccasins; padded as they were against the sharp rocks, they were worn and cut to ribbons. He sought the hovel of the governor, and took out his knife, a thing which these people coveted ardently.

"Give me fresh moccasins for her," he said. "I buy them with this."

Two other men were crowded in beside Dark Sky. Grunts broke from them all; grunts of instant refusal. They were kind of heart, these peaceful red men, and very pitiful; they, too, had suffered from raiding scalp-hunters. Dark Sky refused the knife, and issued him moccasins from the common store for the woman. Diego took them back and left them beside her. He looked at her face as she lay in exhausted slumber, and went out thoughtfully. A magnificent creature, he thought; strange, the way she had spoken about this country!

"She seems to admire it," he thought, and shrugged. "What would these people say if they could see Andalusia, and the orange groves of Granada! Yet

to them, perhaps it seems as lovely as Granada does to me— who will never see it again, And that odd sentence— everyone who is living, must some day die. True, of course; perhaps I misunderstood her. She's well named. She's as far above all these people, here and elsewhere, as the sun is above the earth!"

That evening Diego was permitted to attend the council of the elders, in the big kiva underground; his wisdom and help had been of great aid to these men, for he tried to repay their kindness in various ways, and they held him in high regard. He did not speak, for he was not asked, nor was there any need.

"Take them in, and be damned to the Navajoas!" he interpreted the general sentiment to himself, and smiled. The medicine man so advised in almost identical words, and the vote of the council was unanimous. Later, in private, Dark Sky rather anxiously asked him to speak.

"Well done," said Diego. "Your gods are strong. You can do still better. Send out boys in parties of three, relieving each other every few days, to keep a watch against any enemies— not close by, but at a distance. Navajoas will come by the water, by springs and wells; not a hard matter to watch. And there is something else."

He unfastened his knife and sheath, and laid it down.

"I have a sword. Why should I carry this always, when it can be of use to so many? Take it for the use of all, that it may be shared by my friends alike."

It was such things as this that had endeared him to these red men. And the advice was sound; the governor followed it at once. The Navajoas were days and weeks away from their own country. They might raid and attack swiftly, or they might lurk somewhere about for a long time, to Jull their victims into security. A watch was essential, therefore.

Next morning Diego was out in the sunlight, shaping an arrow-shaft, when a bad spell of coughing seized him, bringing up bright blood, racking him terribly. As he sat resting, Isabella came to him, anxiety in her usually merry eyes, bringing a pot of water. He drank gratefully.

"I shall cure you, Ironheart!" she exclaimed. "The medicine man is going to help me. I have found the way!"

"You are kind," he said, and thought little more of it. He felt there was no cure.

These next days wrapped him in joyous amazement and wonder, because of the woman from the San Marcos pueblo. Rested and refreshed, she was a new creature, both to him and to the folk around. She was his own kind, yet far above him in every way, as he admitted to himself; she was of the pueblo folk, yet not of them. Her nobility, her breadth of vision, her splendid springing spirit, left him breathless and awed; none the less, he knew with a wrench at his heart that he, Don Diego Benalcasar, loved this woman of dusky skin.

They spent much time together, in the cotton field, in the corn patches, out along the winding Pecos and on the high mesas, though any climbing wearied him terribly. Always he found in her something new and amazing. She was not like so many, resenting hardships and toil. Instead, she gloried in everything, chiefly in the land itself, even in the bare naked ridges of rock.

"Magnificent, all of it!" she would say in an ecstasy of emotion, a very rare quality among these redskins, who took everything for granted. "This rock is hard, resistant, conquering all things except wind and water! And this river, making the green things grow, corn for our hunger, cotton for our backs— this sunlight that makes the yucca grow in the hot empty sand! The yucca, whose fiber makes our baskets and strong nets! Why, everything in this country is wonderful!"

Diego told her of Granada, of the olive groves, of the orange trees, the most beautiful country in the whole world.

"Then why did you leave it?" she flashed out at him.

"Because my people lost it," he said sadly. "They became soft, enervated, unlike the hardy desert warriors who first came and seized it."

"You stand convicted out of your own mouth," said she. Or, in her actual words, "You are bitten by your own rattlesnake, brother. From what you say, yours is a soft country where beauty grows with little toil or labor. That is deceptive, like the little gray rattlesnake who makes no noise. Such a country breeds soft folk. Look at my people! We are hard, we work all day; we are tough. Even the Comanches cannot destroy us. Why? Because we are of this country, firm like the rocks!"

"Yet your own pueblo and your people are no more," he reminded her. She did not flinch.

"True. Everyone who is living must some day die," she said calmly. "All my people must some day pass, all my race; who will have this country then? Perhaps your people. But they must be of rock and fire, they must love a hard life; they, like wind and water, must be able to conquer this naked rock!"

Diego was shaken, as her words opened his mind. He gradually found himself sharing her feelings; he beheld all this land in a new light, a truer light. Doomed to see his own people nevermore, he found new values in everything around him; here, gold was dross but an edge of steel meant food and living.

She told him strange legends of her ancient race, misty beliefs half lost in long ages; how their ancestors had come out of west or east, she was not sure which, but always down— they had lived in high places; they and their gods alike were of the mountains. They were different from other Indians because they lived together and tilled the soil; their social sense was an inheritance

from the dim past. So was the fact that they lived on the tops of rocky eminences, not huddling in hidden cliffdwellings like the cave people.

Everything that was living, must some day die— these words held no bitterness or sadness. They merely expressed an inevitable fact of nature to be accepted with intelligence. Diego found this so impressive that he came to look upon it as a deep teaching. He made no secret of his own situation to her, and she nodded quietly.

"Yes, I know. Word reached us last year about the white men and their strange beasts, and how one of them remained at this pueblo to die. That is why we came here, rather than go to Acoma or elsewhere. I was curious. Yes, you must die, brother; death is in your eyes."

He met her calm, wise look and smiled; he had no whining sorrow for himself.

"Well, that is a pity, Bright Sky, I have never met a woman like you. Together, we might make beautiful places in this country, even more beautiful than the places your people make." He pointed to the terraces and cornfields. "The oranges of which I told you— why, we might plant them here! We might grow the golden fruit; anything is possible to you and me working together! We were made for each other, to accomplish things, to love and live greatly!"

"Yes, that is quite true." Her calm words surprised and confounded him. A strange love-making! "But you must die, as I must. What of that? Are you a savage Apache, who sees in death only the end of everything?"

She threw out a hand toward the green expanses along the river, then her hand fell upon his and rested there.

"Death is nothing to fear. The corn dies and is renewed. The leaves die and spring again. We die, and meet once more in the land of the spirit, a strong and glorious country like this of ours, where the gods never hide their faces. Yes; here or there, we shall plant the orange trees you tell about...."

Not for the first time nor the last, her wisdom startled him beyond words; he lifted her brown fingers to his lips, and strength flowed into him from her, and knowledge.

It broke upon him thus suddenly; she was one with him, she loved him! This was why she opened her heart to him with words and thoughts her people could not comprehend. That he kissed her fingers amused her, brought laughter to her eyes; but there was no laughter when he put his hands on her arms and bent his forehead to her left shoulder, in the custom of her people, and touched her cheek with his. She did the same, and murmured at his ear:

"Together, yes! And we shall not forget to plant the orange trees...."

Love, like death, was a simple thing here, taken for granted and accepted without astonishment, like the sunlight or the rain.

During all this time there came no word of any alarm from the guards on the mesa crests watching the trails and waterholes; and as it was the season of the buffalo run, a party of hunters went out. Luckily a dozen hunters from the Tesuque pueblo happened past on the same errand, and forces were joined. To kill the shaggy bison afoot, with bow and spear, was easier for many than for few.

But destiny, as it chanced, was plotting at other things than buffalo.

EARLY one evening Isabella, daughter of the governor, came to the little stone-walled room at the south end of the pueblo, where Diego and Bright Sun sat eating. She saluted them, hands to shoulders, and then put into Diego's hand a bit of leather folded about something. Her dancing eyes were alight and radiant.

"You must not look at it now!" she warned. him. "It is your god, the king of the gods. The medicine man is ready and waiting for you in the kiva of ceremony. Go to him, and you will be cured."

"I? Cured?" demanded Diego. He glanced at Bright Sun, who nodded.

"Yes; she is right. I know all about it. Go."

Diego grimaced and assented. Isabella gtunted happily.

"The ancient god you gave me had only one eye; so I have made your god without a nose. A god has no need of a nose. Perhaps the luck is better if the god is not complete. But you must only look at it when the medicine man tells you and sings to heal you."

Purely to please her, because there was nothing inviting about this curative rite, Diego complied and went to the kiva where such ceremonies were held.

He went down the ladder to the first landing, and found the medicine man waiting. Below, a fire was going and an aromatic smoke wreathing up. Diego stripped, and with his guide went on down to what he mentally termed the torture chamber. He seated himself before the fire, purified himself with water, and the medicine man sat with his drum across the little round chamber and began his chants of healing.

It lasted a long time, far into the night. Diego found the smoke difficult to endure, yet it was not hard on his lungs; at a certain point, the priest ordered him to set his god in front of the little fire and to look upon his steadily. Diego unwrapped the object he had brought and examined it as he set it beside the fireglow.

It was a crude little man-effigy, with rudimentary arms and legs and a queer head. It was of clay, baked hard like a pot, unpainted; the only semblance of a face lay in three tiny holes for eyes and mouth, pricked with the end of a bone awl. Then he looked again, with sudden affectionate

comprehension of the kindly Isabella's art. That queer thing about the head— why, it was made to represent a crown! This was what she had meant; the king of the gods!

Almost unconsciously Diego crossed himself. Emotion stirred in him, as he gazed upon this minute clay image. What was this thing, after all? Not what careless eyes told, but what the woman who made it had intended— the intent was the thing, the creative effort in her heart. It was not a little blob of clay; it was an image of the Lord God.

Diego crossed himself again, and his head bowed, and long unuttered prayers came to his lips, while the medicine-man drummed and sang. And, far above in the pueblo, a boy runner came panting in with word of a Navajoa war-party on the way; but no one dared enter the kiva or disturb a sacred rite with this news.

Not until he crawled out in the early morning hours, stiff and smoke-rimed and half dead with aromatic fumes, did Diego learn that the Navajoas were coming, still distant but probably arriving by next evening.

He got out his steel cuirass, wiped off the grease that kept it and his sword from rusting, and buckled it on. Bright Sun helped him. He looked down ruefully at it.

"Once I filled it; now I'm like a kernel rattling in a nut!" he said whimsically. "Well, Pl rattle to some purpose, at least! And when there's no more fear of foes, and all is quiet here, you and I will think again about those orange trees. We can send down to the south into Mexico and get some seeds...."

WITH morning, satisfied that he could still employ his long-unused arms, he sat in the council chamber and listened to the report of a second runner. The party of Navajoas were in unusual strength and would arrive here late in the afternoon.

"Now let me advise you, brothers," said Diego, "for war is my business. The moon is at full and comes up early. These raiders ate sufficient to cause frightful havoc and take many scalps; they plan to take you by surprise, thinking that panic will give them an easy victory. Is this so? They will attack by moonlight."

The governor and the old men assented. Diego went on, shrewdly.

"Therefore, go into the cornfields as usual, returning at sunset. Let them think their presence is unsuspected. They will attack at the north slope, where the wall of rock has crumbled and left an unguarded path. With those three valiant men of the San Marcos pueblo, I will hide there among the great rocks below and attack them when they climb; you can then spring out from hiding above and use your bows. Have you sent to warn the hunters?"

Yes, this had been done at the first alarm, runners going out to bring back the big hunting party whose absence left the defenders sadly thinned in numbers. Whether or not the hunters could get back by this*evening was a different matter.

Diego's plan was adopted, though with some hesitation; it was not pleasant to go out into the cornfields when Navajoas might leap into sight at any instant. The three men of San Marcos were delighted by the plan; they asked nothing better than to die killing these wild bestial raiders who had destroyed their home and people.

The day wore on. Quietly and unostentatiously the supplies of water were replenished, the preparations were made along the walls, while parties worked as usual in the cornfields or gathering piñon nuts, which were now ripe, or trapping up the river. Scouts reported hourly on the approach of the enemy, who drifted like shadows across the sunlight, little dreaming that their every move was noted.

Toward sunset Diego was incredulous to hear that the Navajoas were actually here, on the long western slopes; he could see not a sign of them or any living thing among the pifion trees. The people came in from the fields and river. The life of the pueblo continued as usual. The three men of San Marcos, weapons ready, stone axes in hand, one by one secreted themselves among the tangle of rocks below the crumbled cliff-side at the north end. Diego waited for darkness, lest the glint of his steel cuirass betray him.

He sat with Bright Sun, watching the sunset. She was calm as usual; beside them sat Isabella, dancing eyes anxious as she watched her husband and son making ready arrows and rocks along the walls; she was stringing her turkey-bone necklace, and in the little black pot lay the one-eyed Aztec head, which she regarded as a great treasure.

"I shall hide all this," she said, indicating beads and pot, "when darkness falls, so that if the worst happens, the Navajoas will never get these things! I know of a hole under one of the houses where it will be safe."

Diego smiled. "Then put this with it." He extended something wrapped in skin. "It is the image of the king of the gods; it is safer than if I keep it."

Isabella nodded sagely and stowed it away in the little black jar. The sun was gone under the western slopes; she rose and departed. Diego looked at Bright Sun, inquiringly.

"You will keep safely under cover? Remember, I can't plant those orange trees without your help!"

She laughed a little, nodding.

"Yes, yes! But the women must fight like the men; there are no cowards here, Ironheart. A strange thing, this metal!" She touched. his cuirass and his

sword. "Iron! They named you for it. Well, you say the rain and sunlight eat it away faster than a rock, so it is a poor name. I shall give you a new name, the word you applied to those trees—"

"Naranja," he said, laughing. "Or, in the language of my Arabic ancestors, naranj. So that's my mame, eh? A good omen! Well, time to go."

He bent his head to her shoulder, and she to his; and the gathering darkness below enfolded him.

Finding a niche among the big rocks below, Diego esconced himself, bared his stout blade, and waited; the moon, almost at full, was already up, but this western slope of the rocky ridge would be in deep shadow for a long while. All the better for the raiders, hoping to rush this entire pueblo, catch it off guard, and sweep into an orgy of murder, like savage dogs in a rabbit-warren.

Diego could hear nothing. His three men understood that they were to await word from him; he could not even hear them breathe, yet they were somewhere close.

He thought of Bright Sun, above; he had thought of her all along. That was why he had proposed this plan— to keep the danger away from those up above, if possible. Neither he nor the three men of San Marcos had any illusions about it, but he trusted that the steel cuirass would save him from the worst. And he had taught the pueblo men to use shields of tough hide on wooden frames; a great thing for them to learn, since the chief missiles used in this fighting were arrows, until it came to hand-to-hand work.

Time passed. Moonlight silvered the western slopes, and ran radiant fingers along the crest of the pueblo above. Coyotes howled insane mouthings at the moon, jabbering cries like the shrieks of lost souls— or were they coyotes? The half-wild dogs of the pueblo burst into furious threats of repartee, and quieted again.

Nothing moved, nothing showed. Diego tensed abruptly, and gathered his muscles, his fingers gripping on the rough wirewound hilt of his sword. He felt something. Then, with no warning, with only a wild heart-leap, he was aware of something that flitted past through the shadows. Something else. The scrape of a moccasin on stone—then they were all around, halfnaked dark shapes armed with bow and club and spear—

He uprose with a yell and drove his sword into the closest shape. Yell upon yell split the darkness asunder, and were re-echoed from the height above. The three men of San Marcos leaped erect and swung their stone-headed axes. All about were the Navajoas. Along the walls above embers were blown into a blaze that caught piles of dry corn-husks and flamed high, lighting the scene.

No time to think, no time to plan— it was a furious struggle, breast to breast, enemies pressing thickly on the four men here. Stones and arrows

pelted from above on foe and friend alike. Bowstrings hummed and twanged. A stone axe hammered on Diego's cuirass, but his bright sword slit the throat of the wielder.

Caught in their own surprise-trap, the Navajoas scattered and died from sight; a few hurt warriors battled savagely on in blind fury. One of the San Marcos men stood leaning against a huge rock, a spear through his body; arrows tore into him, and he moved not. A second leaped high, clawing at the shaft transfixing his throat. The third was slugging it out with a wounded Navajoa, axe against axe; he dies of a flitting arrow, as his edged axe shattered the painted face and head.

A fit of coughing seized upon Diego.

He doubled up, blood on his lips. Two of the agile red men were upon him, as he staggered for the path up the hill, realizing that he was alone. An arrow struck his corselet and shivered against it. His blade dtove at the nearer redskin with a lunge to the heart; the axe of the other struck him from the side and dazed him. The Navajoa leaped in to finish it, and Diego, still coughing, slashed him across the eyes, then ran him through the body.

A sharp stab of pain in his hip, a thudding shock, and he dropped from sight among the high rocks.

Scattered out, the furious wild men showered bitter shafts upon the defendets above. Five or six of them were climbing at another point, bursting suddenly over the crest of the pueblo wall, their axes and spears strewing death and panic among the women and defenders. Others clambered up to join them.

Many of the raiders lay dead or dying among the rocks below. Even so, plenty remained to burst in upon the defenders with a ferocity whose appalling fury struck the pueblo folk with terror and panic. Others came up and over. Squaws and children were speared or axed as they ran or fought. The whole south corner of the pueblo was breached or taken.

Then it was that the panting, gasping hunters, swelled by the Tesuque men, came along the ridge and took the assailants in rear.

Agile among these hillside rocks, knowing every foot of the ground by heart, they slew as never had the gentle pueblo men slain before. No mercy was asked or given. Of that entire war-party, only a scattered few reached the foot of the slope again, to flee homeward to their own place.

Navajoa skins, it is said, made notable medicine drums both here and at Tesuque for a generation or two afterward.

The cries and wailings of stricken mourners drifted shrilly upon the night. Among others who had journeyed forth to the ghost-land, Isabella of the dancing eyes lay cold and stiff on the upper parapet. Beside her sat Bright Sun,

unmoving, but smiling in the moonlight, her fingers gtipped upon a feathered shaft that protruded from her heart.

When the sad folk came down among the rocks below the trail their cries of grief rose more keenly, then ceased. The feeble voice of Diego was guiding them to him; they came, but could do nothing to aid him. Two arrows had drained the blood out of him; he was all gray and white in the moonlight that by now had crept over the ridge. He looked up as Dark Sky loomed above him, and spoke.

"Bright Sun? She is unhurt?"

The old governor covered his face.

"She is with my daughter. They have gone together."

Diego understood. He coughed, and wiped blood from his lips, and his hand fell.

"Everything that is living— must some day die," he said faintly. His chin dropped on his chest, wearily. "Together; God is kind. We shall plant— the orange trees—"

His head jerked, and he said no more.

SO the golden fruit was not planted— at least in the valley of the Pecos.

But, four hundred years later, heavy rains washed out a ditch in the pueblo of the people, long abandoned. The little black pot of Isabella, broken now, was brought to light. Still within it were the necklace of turkey wingbones, and the queer effigy of clay that was really an image of the king of the gods, and the portrait of the one-eyed Aztec.

And these now belong to people of the new race, who like wind and water, had conquered the naked rock and won all this country of the sun by labor of their hands, and had planted therein orange trees of the spirit.

———————

2: The Were-Cougar

Raymond S. Spears

1876-1950

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THE red-men noticed a long time ago that the cougars, huge cats, in the Silent Mountains were different from others beyond the wide, dry valleys surrounding the clustered range. When the scientists came they made the wise observation that the cougars were inbred, and some had six claws, some five claws; some had four claws with dews, and cranial teeth and skeleton details often varied greatly from the accepted standard. This was not without its like in natural history. Indeed, in this same range the bears disclosed a new variety entirely different in some respects from other bears, as if the animals had been so long isolated that they, too, had developed characteristics especially adapted to the living conditions or the moral atmosphere of the timber, stone, life and spirit of the strange, haunting land of tree-grown, jagged rocks. Mesquite, spotted oak, whiteleaf, chinquapins, mountain mahogany, wild plum, laurel, cherries, cat's-claw, screwbeans, palo verdes, yopon, boxelder, yellow buckeye and a dozen other tall shrubs and sometimes shadowless trees grew in a desolation with many cacti and thistles, bitter brouse and strange plants. The waters of the springs were mostly bitter, and colored in repulsive hues. Snakes added a crawling menace.

Sometimes following occasional spring showers the whole range was covered with lovely blossoms and at other times the grim sky was cloudless for long periods and the arid winds lifted dust of crumbled vegetation as the gale rasped hot amid the crisp branches with dry locust songs.

The Indians feared and despised the range, though visiting it sometimes out of curiosity. Before the 'Paches were driven away renegade whites came to lurk among the cañons and to lie hidden beyond the reach of posses or rangers. They grew lonely in the desolation, however, returning across the vast alkali flats to bulldoze or propitiate more reputable people.

Finally came an era of attempted settlement by cattlemen who sought to grow beef to feed on the varied grasses and leaves, twigs and whatever might be eaten. The Dogtooth, Curly Horn and Baby Hand brands lost out in the attempts to claim the range. The atmosphere of the Silent Mountains deadened the hopes and nullified the enterprize of the men.

The 'dobe ranch buildings were washed and crumbled down. The few cattle which escaped the last round-ups became savage, long-horned, deer-like creatures as wild as the native animals. The colorful snakes gathered in the weed-patches where the human homes had been, their voices whispering,

sometimes uttering low birdlike notes and again their rattled tails giving angry warning by whirring.

The cougars stalked up and down, few and distorted, a hunchback among them, it was said, more furtive than wolves. Sometimes they would break the silence in a wailing yeowl which echoed in the valleys. They were unchallenged in their domain. Even the bears did not dispute with these cougars, having indeed little need of it, for bees, ants and plants stored up honey, eggs and roots sufficient to keep bruin well fed.

To the Silents came an odd human whose eyes were slanting, whose nose was flat, whose skin was dull grayish-brown. Yet he somehow gave the impression of being white. In the distance he would have been mistaken for a cowboy who had wandered down the line from Wyoming or Montana. His voice was high, shrill and disquieting. His hands were long, slender and effeminate. His ears were pointed at the top and twisted as he listened. He talked a soft, purring dialect of the range and desert, his tone metallic.

He was known and remembered wherever he had been. He threw a good rope when he rode the thick mesquite farther east down Llano River and he was familiar with the salt grass methods along the Gulf Coast. The white riders on the bayous did not know whether he was darky, chink or white. He moved westward rather precipitately when he had shot two white riders who challenged his right to eat at the same long café table with them. He wasn't Mex. or dago, redskin nor any other familiar range race. He was proud, dangerous and as unexpected as a snake or cat.

He went by the name of Yoka. He never explained his name. Few liked him. Those who did could not explain their taste. A queer jigger Yoka was; as amusing as a darky in a white outfit, possessing the rare power of talking a cow down. Sometimes a steer is bad or a heifer mean, full of treachery and exceedingly dangerous. Brahma blood is apt to be that way—fast, powerful and sneaking.

Yoka would whine and whimper to one of these brutes in an ugly mood, and presently the pawing and bellowing would relax, the red eye half close and the charmed animal would actually settle down to chew a cud. But the majority against him crowded Yoka's spirit. He could not hide his resentment at taunts thrown against him, the mean bullying challenges of ignorant and cruel riders toward some one different and inexplicable.

Yoka's courage was as treacherous as his lurking watchfulness. He would slink along, betraying all the symptoms of fear. He would writhe like a man afraid. He would fairly invite the clods or melon rinds thrown at him. Then, just when he seemed about to run, he turned on "Blow Jack" Cabro and shot him dead. He drew his knife on another occasion to slash the face of ''Amigo, the

Handsome" till the *cabellero* had neither nose, cheek nor ears—a horribly efficient job of carving in the art Amigo long had practised. And he stole Juana Cravelo, who admired him much in her broad-hearted way. He took the girl to the Silent Range and reclaimed the Baby Hand ranch, ousting the snakes and rebuilding the fences and cabins to suit himself or according to the desires of Juana.

And Juana was very happy. She had drawn an ace of a husband. Her man treated her fondly, was exceedingly kind and brought a doctor and a mid-wife much against their will when the time came. And her baby was a boy, named by the father Yama. The other name was Brown, only no one ever called Yoka "Brown" except formally when he appeared in town to buy supplies or sell cattle. The boy Yama was at three years of age a thin, long-limbed, naked youngster, active and alert beyond his years, who played about the rancho in the early and late hours of the day, but in midday curled down in the bright purpled shadows of boulders or washed in the cañons up from the outfit. His mother fretted a good deal about the youngster who was as lively and difficult to keep track of as a yearling cat. Yama played with strange creatures. Apparently he knew the snakes by name, and the wild birds feared him. He would creep up to a calf or colt lying down, jump on to its back and, by clinging fast, hand and toe holds, no matter how angrily or fearfully the animal pranced and threw itself, would ride it.

Then the thing dreaded by Juana happened. Her boy disappeared. Toward afternoon one spring day Yama had walked up the rancho cañon and left his bare footprints in the sand of the dry wash. When night fell he had not returned. In the morning Yoka and two riders followed the tracks up the winding, dry stream bed into the heavy timber belt. There they found another track in the stone dust. A cougar with five claws on each paw had come in behind the boy who had— some of the time where the sand was hard— walked on his toes like a dancer.

Jerry Reel, one of the two cowboys, exclaimed his horror, but Yoka laughed in a high, shrill, brassy voice. The other rider, Garcia Valsco, grimaced with rolling eyes and crossed himself. Around the next bend but one they found where the claws of the trailing cougar had dug deep, and with scratching, slipping haste had raced up the line of the boy's tracks. A scuffle had ensued, after which the big cat turned back to enter the brush, with no sign of the boy thereafter.

Yoka looked slyly at the two riders, grinning. The cow hands blinked, drew away nervously and, as their horses were smelling the cougar, they let the animals race back down the cañon. They did not tarry. Drawing their time, both left the Silent Mountains, all through with the Baby Hand brand. They saw

Juana bent in grief, wailing her sorrow while Yoka looked on, apparently amused.

"He's all right," they heard Yoka tell the woman.

But on the following night, when the two cowboys had camped at the Half Way Spring, Juana arrived on horseback and declared that she, too, was all through with the Silent Range. And Jerry, finding she was afraid and penniless, gave her his three months' wages and took her home to La Bajada where presently he persuaded her to marry him. And the wandering cowboy settled down in Little Bend where he did a good stroke of business, sufficient to establish him with a brand of his own, the Question Box.

YOKA learned of this some time afterward. He snarled his rage in the Tillway station beyond Colorado Mountain. Those who saw his anger were inclined to be neutral in such a personal matter. At the same time the fellow's rage was chilling to their blood. He hissed, spit, growled and slithered back and forth with his back humped and his eyes squinting, curiously feline in his gliding grace. He seemed rather to put on most of his gestures as though for effect, but he bought a lot of ammunition for his rifle and sharpened his long sheath knife on a razor hone. When Yoka left to ride on into the southeast toward Little Bend, Frank Dongey stepped to the long distance telephone and sent word on ahead to Jerry Reel.

"Much obliged, Frank," Jerry replied. "I'd kind of lost track of my suspicions."

Jerry left his rancho with the kiss of his wife warm on his lips. He rode through the Wampum Belt Mountains to the edge of Roselight Desert and saw a rider coming up out of the wide valley toward the mountains. The rider swung from the train to enter a gulch over west of where Jerry was waiting. This enabled the two to meet, so to speak, under the auspices of the stars and have it out. Jerry would not shoot from ambush, though Yoka unquestionably intended to strike from cover. However, when there was nothing else to do, Yoka rode up to do his worst. Jerry was not only a bit the quicker, he was much the straighter shooter, and so the man, Yoka died with three bullets in him, one in the forehead above the eyes.

Except for the fact that some branded cattle now ranged among the wild of the Silent Range and the Baby Rancho fell again into abandonment, there was little change in the mountains. Juana and Jerry, however, rode after a time over to the place. Juana desired to obtain some mementoes of her first born. She was still aching in her heart at the thought of her baby boy who had been carried away by the big, five-toed puma.

When they arrived at the rancho, the quiet of the scene was unspeakable. House cats lurked along the shadows, hunting birds. Within, though five months or so had elapsed since Yoka was lost in the Wampum Belts, the appearance was that he had only just ridden up the cañon. No one had been there. Canned goods, dried beef, smoked ham and bacon, a spare rifle over the fireplace and other things gave the impression of recent occupation. Juana found all the things she had longed for— toys, little dishes and trivialities a baby would naturally love. While she was gathering these, Jerry strolled out around, looking the scene over.

Out by the corral he found something that bade him pause. Lying stretched on the ground, as if it had just fallen dead, was a cougar. The brute was of great size, nearly ten feet long, Jerry's estimate. Only when he went closer did he see that the animal had been dead a long time, and the hot sun and arid wind had withered the gaunt frame, drying out the flesh. The carcass was occupied by an army of ants whose industry had cut away flesh and hide to the roots of the hair, tufts of which blew from the loosed carcass like milkweed, dandelion or cottonwood seeds.

In the center of the forehead was a hole, a chip of the skull having fallen in. The lips, drawn back from the old, yellow feline teeth gave the brute a particularly sinister expression. The very hollows where the eyes had been were full of ominous shadows. Jerry Reel had read trails of cattle, horses and other range creatures. He now harked back to his ride up the cañon where he had seen the tracks of a five-clawed cougar among those of a child.

He now poked away the hair of the pads of this evil brute and, staring at them, he ransacked back in his memory for exact data. He fitted these paws to those tracks. He could not be mistaken; this was the same cougar that had carried away the boy. His first thought was, of course, of his wife. He caught a canvas tarp which was hanging over a tie rail where it had been folded and thrown when the last wagon load of supplies was brought in to the Baby Brand ranch and spread it down beside the wasted skeleton. He scraped and rolled up the bones and hair of the dead cougar, the carcass crumbling, its dust blowing in the wind, and then carried the dry mess in the tarpaulin into the mesquite where his wife need never be tormented by this reminder of the animal which had carried away her baby boy.

Then, being of an economical instinct, Jerry brushed the tarp clean and carried it back to where it belonged in the storehouse. The place was a good ranch. Its isolation was in favor of its attraction. Considerable profit could be made by development. The signs were of a good herd of cattle, run wild in the mountains. With his outfit Jerry was sure he could make it pay. Surely, for a man of parts and ability two ranches are better than one. The careless cowboy

had become a responsible, ambitious citizen. Unquestionably his wife had been the making of him. He could send Billy Cohoma into this country with the assurance of adequate financial backing, a whack-up on profits, and the foreman would surely be a good superintendent. And besides, Billy had lately married and was now restless for a ranch of his own.

Or Jerry could take over the Baby Brand, leaving Billy down on the Question Box. On broaching the subject to Juana, she smiled happily at the idea. She loved this place. She confessed to the foolish idea that Yama, her son, was alive. Despite the passage of more than five years since his disappearance, hope had not departed. She knew this could not possibly be a true idea, and yet the feeling was strong in her soul that her child needed her. Jerry stared. How could she know? He did not tell her of the dead cougar. Neither did he tell her of something else as amazing as it was distressing to think about.

He had found tracks which he had recognized unmistakably. The boy was alive. He had grown a good deal in five years, and he walked most of the time on his toes, but where he stepped plantigrade, his weight on his heels, the shape of his feet— long, narrow and with spread toes at times— would not be denied. The boy was past eight years of age now. And he hunted with these Silent Mountain cougars. He had come down to the old rancho, where he circled the carcass of the dead cougar so often his feet had worn a trail in the hard, baked clay.

Jerry was sorry for the poor chap. Loving his wife so much, the rancher could only sympathize with her grief. Yet he dreaded and hesitated to tell her what he knew was the terrible truth. The he-cougar had carried the baby human back into the mountains and had given him over to be the plaything of the kittens of his spouse. Now the boy had become a wild thing, hardly human. He was growing up with the savage beasts. The cougars played and romped together. The litters hunted in a pack like wolves, guided by the superior child intelligence of their playmate. And Reel, having known the father of the child, having been witness to the man's strange powers over beasts, could only wonder at the man who, by his smiles, must have realized the cougar would not harm his offspring—if indeed, he had not been in league with the distorted panthers of the Silent Mountains.

Juana allowed Jerry to ride away to hire help, to turn Billy Cohoma into a full-fledged ranch superintendent of the ranch hey were leaving and to bring in whatever supplies were needed. When he returned he found his wife shining with excitement.

"Jerry!" she cried. "Yama's alive! I heard him up in the mesquite. It was bright moonlight, and I heard him calling. When I answered I heard him laugh

as he walked along the edge of the mesquite. Oh, I know it was Yama! I couldn't be mistaken. But he would not come near."

"He's run wild, dear girl!" he told her.

"Oh, yes!' she laughed. ''He escaped the cougars. We must catch him, you know. Oh, he'll be sly! I've seen his tracks up the cañon in the sand."

Jerry nodded. No use to argue with a woman. Nevertheless, he was glad she knew and took the news so well. At the same time he wondered what manner of boy Yama would be when caught and brought down out of the mountain thickets. The mother had not realized the truth that her son was a cougar boy, reared ferociously with lurking felines.

THE five men Jerry had brought in to help drive down the cattle, now thoroughly wild, did not miss the tracks of the boy in the sand. Their horses shied at these footprints or at the whiff of scent left by the strange human's passing. They talked about the matter, but Jerry made no explanations. How could he let them know the sorrow of his wife? At the same time when they talked of "Wild Injun," "Crazy Man" and even of "one o' them g'rillas," he forestalled possible reckless cruelty of the hard-bitted mesquite and border riders through fearful superstition.

"If you have a chance, drop your rope on him," Jerry ordered. "If you stretch him out, don't shoot. I'll kill any man who draws a gun on the kid. He's just a kid anyhow. Look't his tracks! No danger yet to women."

Perhaps one or two of the riders would have shot a wild boy to rid the range of a dangerous menace. They heard the weird cries of the ranging were-child at night, just singing to himself or answering his wide flung hunting mates. The sound added to the discomfort of the riders caught out and compelled to sleep away back up in the range. At the same time their curiosity mingled with their uncanny dreads.

Plenty of work held the men to the job.

The cattle, which had lived well as a result of three wet seasons, were wild and mean to handle, but all the men were mesquite, jungle and Brahma drivers and ropers. They presently had a hundred head of feeders brought down to be driven to the shipping pens and out to the rich grazing lands to be fattened. The question of ownership was readily settled by Mrs. Jerry Reel who, as Yoka Brown's widow, had her own claim, and the guardianship of Yama Brown Reel clinched the claim since the uncaught boy's interests were now paramount.

At night the unpleasant cries came down out of the mountains, cougar scream and boyish wailing yell. All heard it. The mystery of the Silent Range, long a tradition, did not lose now in the retelling as the cowboys talked it over.

Bit by bit the truth was segregated. And one night when Juana slipped away up the cañon, as her tracks betrayed she was accustomed to doing, Jerry followed. By the moonlight he saw in the breadth of flat sandy dry bottom where she sat down to talk into the shadows.

After a time Jerry heard an answer. He heard talking back and forth in purring, cooing, murmuring sibilants. Then three shadows crossed the pale, shimmering surface of sand, two couchant felines not accustomed to this woman. The other was a slender, tawny youth, a boy, who drew near and presently sat down by the mother. There they were, two stalwart cougars lying questioningly at a little distance and the were-cat child.

Jerry could not understand the croonings and purrings. He understood the situation, however. The mother had been unable to win the child back to humans or down to the rancho outfit. She was afraid to trust any one in her dilemma. But Jerry was a better hunter than the cats themselves. He threw a long, pencil-size rawhide riata and dropped its noose to snare the wildling. Thus he captured the boy and, with a whoop, drove the two cougars away into their native mesquite.

Juana rejoiced. Yama was a snarling, clawing, biting wild animal when his stepfather tied him up, hands and feet, to carry him down to the buildings. Long since Jerry had figured out what was best to do. He put a stout brass-studded dog-collar on the boy's neck, and chained him to a long wire by a sliding ring. A comfortable shack, dark and well aired gave shelter for the lad. Plenty to drink and plenty to eat was assured. And thus Yama returned to the haunts of his own kind.

The cowboys never had seen such a spectacle before. They would sit around on their heels, talking to the boy. They told him stories. They played the French Harp for him. They fed him raw meat on the sly despite Jerry's not too strict orders to the contrary. And they admired the boy's skill and craft, catching jackrabbits which came down their trails in the mesquite under his sliding chain to the waterhole. Yama waited with unexampled patience for hours to have a chance to spring upon these lank hares.

The riders now all knew of Juana's son. Their hearts went out in sympathy to both the mother and the boy. At the same time they listened to the lad's midnight cries with chilled forebodings. They discerned glowering green eyes in the brush and found the paw prints of cougars which came, sometimes bringing raw veal or venison for the captive who answered their purring with guttural snores of his own. They would have killed these visitors but for Juana, who went into hysteria at the suggestion.

"No! No!" she cried. "You must not touch them. They are Yama's kin. And one— he says that one—"

She hesitated in her speech. Apparently Yama had made her understand something for which she had no equivalent words in the language of the cattle range. She alone could at first approach the captive. She would sit beside him on the steps of his kennel cabin while he purred or struggled to control his tongue. Her caresses soothed him, as she stroked his odd, pointed ears, like his father's. Slowly but surely he harked back to his baby words. His memories and associations bridged the wild hiatus in his years. He emerged into humanity again. He united the training his feline foster mother had given him with the human habits and thought which he obtained from his mother and from the kindly cowmen.

When the collar was taken off, he readily entered the big house to prowl along the walls and curl up on the hearthstone of the fireplace or stretch his lean limbs and gaunt figure in the sunshine, basking. He did not forget the learning of the mesquite by-ways and wash caverns of the mountains while he absorbed the wisdom of the human outfit. He would carry his primer booklets through the thick cactus, easing along unscathed by straight prickly pear thorns or hooked cholla spines, to worry the printed language and understand the pictures like a cougar kitten with a bird.

Gentle horses would cringe to Yama's touch. He could walk among the wildest cattle by day, pulling at the horns of the ugliest bulls, kicking calves with his bare feet or pulling the tail of gaunt cows. But at night when he crouched and started across the moonlit barrens—at sight of him the fattest cow would stampede with her tail in the air, driven frantic by a scream like that of a hungry two hundred-pound cat.

Yama walked and rode alone. When he had become accustomed to horses and the rancho work, he liked to go up into the Silent Mountains and bring down cattle which had evaded and escaped the best efforts of the whole outfit. How did he do it? He would turn his odd eyes to squint at the men who tried to solve his secret. On foot he would circle around a bunch of a hundred head, holding them— steers, cows, heifers— in a mass with the calves inside and a barrier of pearly horns quivering like the strange crooked thorns of some living cactus hedge, a huddle of alarm and despair. Yama did easily alone what seven good men could not do at all. At the table, eating, the boy gave his companions the conniptions. Not that he was so savage and messy, for he was perfectly clean and even rather strictly formal, but they understood his throaty warning not to lay hands upon bread or pie, pone or meat within the circuit of his wide half-moon at the table end. And what came within his reach remained untouched by any but himself, though it were a barbecued quarter of veal.

Juana loved her boy. She was proud of his accomplishments. He would take from her what no one, not even Jerry Reel himself, could hint at. And Yama

played with her other babies as no one else could do. He crept and romped with them and he carried the toddlers out into the mesquite, teaching them strange tricks of hide and seek, catch and carry, watch and wait. Juana did not know just what to make of this, especially when Yama came in one time badly scratched by claws, with a bloody knife, and bringing Jackie, her boy, whimpering with excitement. Yama laughed without mirth. He would not explain anything.

Two riders, a day or so later, noticed vultures circling and went to see what was dead. They found a cougar cut and slashed to pieces, an evil cat with a crooked back and misshapen paws. They told Jerry, who went to look more closely at this place of combat. The huge brute had been disemboweled and its throat cut.

"So old Crooked Back wouldn't play gently with Jackie, eh?" Jerry suggested casually to Yama.

"He was ugly and he was always bad," Yama shrugged his shoulders.

"We'd better be rid of some more of them," Jerry remarked quietly. "They eat too many calves and colts."

"Not so many." Yama shook his head. "You kill, perhaps, the ones which keep down the rabbits, who would overrun the mountains but for us, I mean for the cats. What are a few calves compared to a rabbit for every blade of grass?"

"But do they all kill calves?" Jerry inquired. casually.

The boy-cat hesitated. The man saw furtiveness and doubt in the expression of Yama's gesture.

"I know what you mean," the youth presently answered slowly. "I go get. Crooked back, he no good. So with some more. A bad bunch, I say."

IN A WEEK Yama had dragged down five cougars, characteristic Silent Mountain animals with deformities of paws and bodies and, doubtlessly, of mind and spirit. One of these was a creature with a horrible head, much too large for so emaciated a body. Yama had killed them, two with knives and three with the heavy revolver he had been taught to use.

"You'll be satisfied now?" the youth demanded with a sidelong, uneasy glance. "You don't have any more killed? You make them, the boys, stop trying to kill cougars now?"

"You want to be cat-killer-in-chief?"

"Leave them to me?" The boy showed his white teeth.

"That's all right," Jerry laughed. 'You know the bad actors which need killing. The others— we'll be friendly, eh?"

"Yes,"' Yama nodded, clearly with great relief.

Accordingly, the riders were told it was Yama's job to kill the bad cougars. This was quite a joke. In the cattle country the idea was that all the cats, the big ones, were bad. Yama argued differently. He said that one cat ate rabbits, another ate birds, a third hunted deer, perhaps. Some would eat grass at times, devouring brouse, berries and the like, going for long periods taking only occasional meat.

"I know one. He eats rats, mice, gophers and prairie dogs," Yama grinned.

"You've quite a range of acquaintance, I'd say," a cowboy who had drifted in from Cornell University suggested.

"You bet!" Yama nodded for he could see the joke.

Yama rode into town with the others. Tank had been organized at the shipping point on the new railroad north of Silent Mountains. Here the accommodations were not unusual in the cattle country. A big cutting pen into which were driven shippers, by brand or purchase, was the chief feature of the new settlement. But the single street boasted dance-hall, bank, general store, hotel and sundry other town necessities. The Baby Hand brand boys romped in to enjoy a Saturday night on occasion.

His partner was picked by his friends. She was Maria Travance, a slender and pretty girl. She was one of the first to wear golf knickerbockers in the Red Wastes. She carried herself with an attractive aloofness and a certain impudence or insouciance, yet watched well her step. She was attracted to Yama immediately and Yama walked the floor around her with possessive tread.

Her skin was remarkably like his in paleness and texture. Her eyes were ever so little aslant, dark and changing color from gold to purple, from nearly black to light brown. When she walked, her feet hung limply on her ankles, and she glided with that same curving feline gracefulness which characterized Yama's gait, even to rising at times on her toes as though in sheer exuberance of eager strength.

The boys had to explain the customs and forms to Yama, hold him in restraint, for he was a savage monopolist, having held the hand and looked into the eyes of this fair young woman who was more than amused by the handsome youth of whom she had already heard some strange rumors. She was herself hardly less mysterious than the youth— smiling, seemingly indifferent and yet on the instant resenting with feral lack of warning any overt trespass or evil insinuation.

"Big Hank" Trobel alone was all out of sympathy with the youngster. For one thing, he despised cats. Yama had won his own place in the community. He rode with the best of them. He had quickly acquired the art of the lariat. He was, as indicated, a master of the round-up work. His eagerness to learn was

both youthful and human. But he had learned to walk like cats in a mountain den among a family of cougars. To some he personified grace, but Big Hank Trobel felt his back crawl like a dog's when he saw Yama go strolling by and when he saw Maria Travance in Yama's arms, the one girl who had jeeringly scorned the burly wanderer into the Red Waste country, he was angrily beside himself.

Big Hank was merely a bullying vagabond rider, competent yet unimportant. 'Yama was the son of a rancho owner. Indeed, the boy had inherited property of his own from Yoka, his father, and Jerry Reel was meticulous in his honest accounting, seeing to it that the boy's profits were safely stored away in his mother's name while the youngster was taught the mathematics of humans. The cowboy needed to watch his step, and knew it.

Big Hank was treacherous. Having been a sailor on the seven seas, the mischance of a wreck had thrown him ashore on the pampas where he learned to ride from the gauchos 'Thence he drifted into the Red Waste pastures, bringing no one knew what miscellaneous lore gathered first hand with experience and adventure in the far places— especially in India with whose Naga tribes he claimed at times with hesitant lowering of voice a certain intimacy.

Seeing Maria rapt in the attention of Yama, Big Hank invited "Lank Susie" for a turn around the hall. As the two circled, he readily found the opportunity to come along beside the apparently engrossed Yama, his charming by the girl being the joke of the floor. The jealous rider essayed to trip the youth, but the boy who had walked with cats flexed his ankle so his foot dragged over the man's clumsy boot like an oar feathering a ripple. The man tried again and again, till the youth knew he must pay attention to the obvious challenge. Yama was in no mood to fight. He was happy beyond all his experience. He dreaded an interruption, but he saw his friends watching him with nervous expectancy and could not evade the issue the rival raised. Still he gave no sign.

Big Hank swung around again, nearer and nearer. He made his approach behind Lank Susie's hardly protecting figure. She was, indeed, but a narrow strip against the burly man's stalwart frame. Once more he thrust forward his heavy foot, but this time his victim did not glide clear. Instead, Yama dropped to the floor on all fours, seized the offending cowboy's high-heeled boot and twisted it. The sharp snap of a disjointed knee followed by the man's agonized howl as he pounded prostrate on to the waxed plank floor startled the quiet.

On his back, Big Hank looked up into the wide open lips and clenched teeth of the youth who was couchant on him. Instead, of using his teeth, Yama had drawn his knife and the point was quivering already through the rival's throat-skin. Paralyzed, hurt and facing the particularly horrible death at the blade of a

knife pressed end-on against his neck, Big Hank was perfectly helpless physically, yet he looked the youth in the eyes. No coward, this big fellow! Instead he was brave in his folly. He whispered soft, low, indistinct whispering notes, and the blade was not driven home.

And presently Yama drew back, stood up, retreating and stared at the man, puzzled and fascinated. Something, neither Yama nor the spectators could tell what, had changed the impulse of a moment before to kill into an emotion entirely different. And Big Hank, the much-traveled wanderer, grinned despite his upset knee as he sat up, reared on to his sound leg and then hopped toward the dance-hall entrance to see the local surgeon who with a jerk replaced the ball in its socket. For many days Big Hank was obliged to walk on a crutch, but he did not mind that. Indeed, he had always found learning an expensive proposition, since man must ever pay much for what he knows. There are no bargains in knowledge. Big Hank gave a hint or two. Then he packed his mule and saddled his horse to ride away.

No one knew what became of Big Hank. When he had taken his departure, it was remembered that he had boasted rather enigmatically of possessing strange lore, including why tigers sometimes eat men and why leopards are the charmed creatures of the Himalaya foothills. He hated cats for himself, but this was because he knew the brutes. Before he went away he told Lank Susie to tell Maria Travance she had better burn catnip for her sweetheart. The truth is, perhaps, Big Hank was too sure he had the advantage of learning over the people of Red Waste and especially over a certain lad in the Silent Mountains who could not understand his own predicament.

MARIA TRAVANCE listened to Lank Susie with unusually marked attention. She, too, had wandered much and, despite her young years, possessed a great deal of miscellaneous information and intuition. She passed for English due to her rare excellence of manner and tactfulness. Yet had any one really been observant, he would have noticed a certain bluish tinge to the young woman's fingernails. And, moreover, the tops of her ears were pointed distinctly and her feet were long, narrow and beautiful. She was, in fact, more than superficially of the same breed as Yama Brown. She did not belittle the warning which Big Hank had sent her. Nor did she boast of it.

She instantly obtained a horse and rode out on the new Baby Hand rancho trail, though she had been awake all night, dancing as was her wont, the odd nautch-girl solo figures as well as the usual duos and Spanish figures. She arrived within four hours at the ranch, her horse dropping dead as she rounded the corner of the corral.

But Yama seemed to have known she was coming or had heard her horse. He was there to disengage her from the saddle. She caught him by his shoulders, pouring into his ears what neither ever told any one. He listened intently. He nodded, not smiling. He kissed her gratefully and proudly took her to introduce his sweetheart to his mother. And Juana, who had heard about this enchantress, regarded the young woman with searching gaze. Well satisfied, she took Maria into the cabin. Yama went immediately to the corral, though it was a blistering day, rode up the cañon and presently two of the boys lying in the shadow of a rock saw him go by at a gallop, despite the punishment to the horse on the grade in that hot, breathless air.

Yama was gone some time. He did not reappear for three days. Maria walked up and down the floor, turning and returning, her slender, beautiful figure sinuous as her shoulders moved back and forth. In the night Jerry and Juana Reel heard her soft footsteps as she paced the floor in her room. They, too, felt her anxiety, but what could be done? Attempts to find Yama had been futile. He had hung his saddle on a mesquite fork, thrown his bridle over it, turning the horse loose in the high grass flat, and vanished. On the night of the third day, Maria suddenly was heard to utter a low cry. She ran out into the darkness and up the cañon by light of the stars. Jerry, Juana and the cowmen in the bunkhouse were all awakened by the young woman's strange moaning as she raced away. Jerry and two of his men hurried after her as soon as they could saddle horses.

The mountains were full of strange voices that night. The dark wind made the stars blink and the cats were walking the ridge backs, wailing. More than a mile up the cañon the three men saw ahead a staggering, stumbling shadow against the faintly glistening sands of the dry wash. To their greeting came answer, and they found it was Maria bearing Yama. She had him around the chest under his arms, and his feet dragged on the ground, a much heavier man than he looked. She exclaimed her gratification that the men were so prompt in coming to her assistance. She uttered odd cries, which were answered from up on the mesquite ridges and she expressed strange things in language they did not understand. She danced behind them as they carried the fainting Yama home.

When they examined the young man, he displayed no wounds or marks of any kind. Maria, however, declared he was desperately hurt, and she must do this and that. She built a tiny fire in the room on a sand box and burned in it bits of leaf and wax which filled the space with strong perfume. A darky who watched her for a few minutes presently turned to run out into the open branding space, dropped on his knees and began to pray with great and unaccustomed fervency. Two very intelligent Mexicans shook their heads and

crossed themselves. The white men scratched their heads wondering what the Hades—

Yama was in a deep sleep. He was limp. Some terrific experience had engrossed him. He responded to Maria's incantations and his mother's equally solicitous ministrations only after a day and three hours. Then he emerged, his eyes glowering in the dark of the night gloom. He sat up, shaking his head and stretching on his knees reaching with his hands, which opened and closed picking up the heavy goat's-hair blankets in his finger tips, as if learning to use his arms again. He stood looking at. his mother who did not quite understand her son and at his sweetheart who quite thoroughly knew him.

"You have done very well!' Yama remarked quietly to both of them.

This was all he would say about his experiences. He was exceedingly grateful to Maria for her warning. Her interest and her love had for him a power to overcome all the evils in the world. They must instantly be married, he declared. To this Juana gave willing assent, and the doings of the marriage fiesta would long be remembered by all those who participated. Sometimes Jerry Reel was puzzled to think how it had all come about. At the same time he was satisfied. Yama, the step-son, was a fine man, able to care for himself, his wife and his property.

SOME TIME later when Yama and Maria had redeemed the old Curly Horn rancho site, Jerry was riding alone away up in the north end of the Silent Mountains range when he came to an obscure runway which seemed to lead out of the open desert from the direction of Tank, the cattle shipping and trade town, back into the higher Silent Mountains. He followed the trail until it ascended to a bench with some of the aspects of a mesa. The flat was grown to rather thick mesquite and much cactus. Crossing this on the trail, Jerry came to a steep slope, went down into a stony gulch and around a turn into a sandy flat. On the flat he saw stretched out no less than three cougars, all dried up and hollowed by winds and ants, their hair still fluffy in tufts on the skeletons.

And among these intact carcass shapes and skeletons were the bones of a human who had been torn to pieces. A revolver and a heavy knife, their butts still encircled by grisly hands lay rusted on the ground. The revolver cylinders were empty, and the skinning blade had been broken. Up the line of the wash were the skeletons of a horse and a mule with saddles and pack. Jerry recognized the outfit. He was looking at the remains of Big Hank Trobel. In the human skull was a lead revolver bullet.

Looking around curiously, studying the details as the wilderness man invariably does, Jerry soon discerned on a sliding talus slope among gnarly weed growths of shrubs and trees the entrance to a cave. He climbed to

inspect it. The place was a mere hole in the mountain, veiled by mesquite. Sunshine in the opening reflected light within.

Beneath the rounded dome Jerry's eyes grew accustomed to the shadows. He at last was able to see clearly. On the level floor was huddled a cougar larger than any of the others. Lying curled up, the man was shocked for an instant by the thought that it might be alive. But this animal, too, was dead, withered in the arid atmosphere. And Yama had been here.

The cat-man had posted about this carcass his knife, revolver, with one shell emptied, lariat, belt of ammunition and even his raw-hide moccasins. And when Jerry sought without irreverence to discover the secret of this thing, he found three flattened bullets which had lodged in the animal when it was alive—bullets, unquestionably, from Big Hank's revolver. Yama had arrived too late to save his cougar mates in their fight with the bully.

And on ledges of the cavern Jerry found stowed away skulls, bright quartz stone and other trinkets. Among the rest he saw a fantastic stick with a shred of rag on it. Yama had carried that "dool" on the day the five-toed cougar had carried the child away to raise it like a cat with a litter of panther kittens. And this was where the human baby had learned his feline tricks.

Jerry could understand the natural history of it. At that, cringing a little, he looked over his shoulder as he felt the chill depression of the other things which were to his mind inexplicable. The mere physical conditions and developments could readily be studied out. The mental attributes were not so easily divined. Jerry was inclined to reckon such matters were none of his blamed business, anyhow, and he'd better be on the prod.

Nevertheless, his human curiosity could not ignore or deny the feeling of urge. Accordingly, some time later he took occasion to tell Maria of the fight scene which he had discovered. Minutely he described each detail, making no comment.

"Yes, I know, but I have not been to see." She shook her head. "Three bullets, you say, in the big cougar? If I tell you something, probably it isn't true. You know, my father was Copper Joe Travance, the Englishman. He married the pretty Sukheli, who came from India to Imperial Valley beyond Calexico and who is my mother. She has told me much nonsense, which I do not believe. Too much. She lived, a Naga girl, at Nikoto, her people having the pointed ears like me. Like Yama, too. When I see his ears, I like him ver' much as you know. He, too, is hill people in India. So Sukheli says we are cat tribe members who see in the dark and perhaps do much hunting. What I do not believe is she says when her sister, a leopard, is sick, she too is ill. And if the spotted jungle walker purrs, she sings. But if some shikirri shoots the leopard, the human is ver' sick, and maybe die. Don't you think my mother 'must be

much strange to believe such foolishness? I do not. I am American. Like my father, I believe no such stuff and nonsense. But I remember one time when Yama was badly hurt and had no wounds."

She laughed, shrugging her shoulders with amusement. At the same time her eyes squinted, a puzzled frown in her forehead as she gave Jerry a sidelong glance to which he paid no attention except to say:

"We need not worry, Maria. Surely a human spirit is stronger than a cat's if we use it right."

At that, Maria gave an ecstatic little shiver and ran to baste the big rib roast she had in the oven of the Curly Horn brand kitchen range, while the 'Pache Indian breed cook was busy mixing up hot bread dough. Jerry was glad he had comforted Yama's wife by his failure to jeer her half belief. Then Yama called him to go over to the water hole for a swim. The men stripped by the limpid spring pool. As he glanced at the long, ribby and supple figure of this half white, half India-Eurasian, Jerry's jaw dropped.

"Eh, Yama! Who's been shooting you? Those three bullet scars!" he demanded.

Yama started with confusion, throwing his arms and hands to cover the pits like healed-over bullet wounds, white and puckered in his skin. The young man blinked, his eyes searching earth and sky for the answer.

"Bullet wounds?" Yama grinned at last slyly and reminding Jerry of the bearing of Yoka, his father, when cornered. ''Nobody has ever shot me yet. No! I have three ver' sore boils one time. Tha's all. Bad boils."

Jerry nodded, turned and plunged into the sweet water depths. He was conscious of having made a break, not minding his own business. The last thing in the world he would do was to hurt his step-son's feelings. When after a time Maria's sweet, high-pitched voice summoned them to eat, she glanced archly at Jerry, smiling:

"You have the good swim, I suspect. Why you look so funny, father dear?"

"The cougar in the cave was hit three times. Here, here— and here," Jerry replied significantly.

"I don't believe it!" she laughed, delighted to see that Jerry in his sympathy could understand.

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3: The Unexpected Lady

Bertram Atkey

1880-1952

The Grand Magazine May 1913

No 5 in the series "The Intrusions of Smiler Bunn"

"AFTER all said and done it always comes back to one thing," said Mr.Smiler Bunn, speaking with extreme earnestness, "and that's the raw material. Mind you, I'll do Sing Song the justice of saying that he can do more with inferior raw material than any cook I ever heard of; but think for a minute of what the man can do with the best raw material. There's no comparison."

Ex-Lord Fortworth nodded gravely and thoughtfully.

"No comparison at all," he agreed.

"Well, there's no doubt that either we've been had on our raw material lately or else it's not so good, generally speaking, as it used to be. More foreign stuff coming into the country, I should say. Anyway, there's only one thing for it— we've got to produce our own raw material if we're going to have proper food. That's as clear as daylight. And this little estate's our chance."

He turned again to the document he was holding, and quoted from it, with comments,

" *'An elaborate range of hothouses has been built*,' " he said. '' You see what that means, Fortworth? The fruit is going to be right—we can watch it grow from the flower— grapes, peaches, melons, figs, and so on. They can be picked at eightfifty-nine and served at nine o'clock breakfast, hot from the bough, so to speak. And, apart from the quality, it would be a very interesting and healthy plan to take a stroll out to the hothouse every night with a cigar and spend a few minutes selecting next day's fruit, vegetables, asparagus, and so forth."

"First-rate— go on,'' said Fortworth, his eyes brightening.

Smilen scanned the document— particulars of a small but very complete country estate for sale— again.

"It means that you can grow your own ducklings and chickens instead of making shift with London stuff. Mind, I haven't any complaint to make against a well-cooked Surrey capon— few men have— but I must admit I should like to see the bird brought up under my own supervision. That's only sense... There's a bit of downland goes with the estate, and we can look to that for some very interesting Southdown, thyme-fed mutton and lamb. Hares are plentiful there, too, it says. Then there's the trout stream that intersects the estate, It's well-stocked— and Sing Song's got a very delicate touch with fish. as we know. Of

course, I always considered trout more suitable for women— give me a good red. mullet, speaking for myself— but still it's nice to know the trout are there if you want 'em. The cellarage is good and ample, and the dairy is well-appointed."

Mr. Bunn put the papers down gently, almost reverently.

"Well, without going through it all again, I must say that it sounds to me like the chance of a lifetime, and the sooner we see it, Fortworth, the better."

"It will probably be dear," said the ex-Baron wistfully.

"If it is, we must find the money somehow," replied Smiler firmly. "As you know, I'm not a superstitious man, but, if you understand, there's something about this estate that calls to me in aloud voice, and I've got to heed it."

"Me, too— it calls to me as well," said Fortworth. "We'd better go and see the agents. Sing Song can telephone for an appointment,'

Mr. Bunn touched the bell. The telephone was on a small table across the room, but neither of the partners rose to do the ringing-up. They were not the kind of employers to keep a man-servant and do the work themselves.

Within the next half-hour they had gleaned a large amount of interesting and pleasing information about the estate from the rather gatrulous agent at the other end of the wire, and— which was perhaps of more value than the information— an invitation to go down into the country and see the place for themselves, It was (said the agent) one of those chances which occur, on a careful average, once in four centuries. The owner was a banker of middle age, who had spent the fore part of his life living in town, over his bank, and at the age of fifty had been seized with the idea that he would like to taste the joys of squiredom. With that pleasure in view he had bought himself an estate some five miles from the big seaside town in which his bank was situated, improved it regardless of cost, and, after a year of the life, had grown not only to dislike it but positively to despise it. Like many a man before him, he preferred the grinding of the trams to the bleating of the lambs, and the locomotive's wail to the babbling nightingale. He had discovered that the sneezing of the taxicab, the deep groan of the motor-'bus, and the whoop of the newsboy satisfied his tastes more thoroughly than the brassy crooning of the cows, the drowsy hiccoughing of hogs, and the low hypnotic hooting of the cuckoo. In short, the agent urged the partners to lose no time in viewing the property. Mr. Levon, the banker in question, would welcome them with the utmost hospitality, and, in confidence, concluded the agent in a husky whisper, a quick sale would not be without its favourable effect on the price.

Thus it was that at about six o'clock on the same evening the big cat of the Bunn-Fortworth Combine, with Sing Song at the wheel, rolled silently through the south-country village of Twitton and turned in at the gates of Lowlake

Park— the estate that had so thoroughly sickened Mr, Randall Levon of country life.

Mr. Levon came out of the plain but comfortable-looking Georgian mansion to receive them. He was a short, bald man, with an acuteangled nose, and little, close-set needle-pointed green eyes. Judging by appearances, not a man one would ask to take care of one's watch and money while one went in for a bathe. He had an air of breeziness that was refreshing, if not too closely in spected. Probably fifty, he looked prosperous, but not likely to refuse a chance of adding to his prosperity. The partners were conscious of a slight feeling of depression as he greeted them with his shifty breeziness. Nor was it removed by the appearance in the hall of Mr. Levon's daughter, Catherine—a pale second edition of her father, with rather hungrier eyes, perhaps, and a quieter manner. She shook hands in a limp, reserved sort of way.

It was late evening when the Combine arrived, and dinner was to be served almost immediately— as soon as a certain Mr. Max Partrey came. Evidently Max was a gentleman who treated dinner with the respect this important function deserves, for he arrived well on time.

Mr. Levon introduced him to the partners as :

"Mr. Partrey— my right hand at the bank— in fact, my *alter ego*— or is it *quid pro quo*? I'm not any too well up in Latin."

"Nor me— nor me," said Fortworth airily.

"Not *quid pro quo*— you'te thinking of *sine qua non*," corrected Mr. Bunn, who knew as much Latin as an Eskimo.

"Well, whatever it is, I want you to meet Max— one of the best and most reliable fellows in the world."

They shook hands, privately forming the opinion that if Mr. Partrey was indeed such a reliable sportsman, his appearance did not unduly advertise the fact. Levon himself was a hard-looking lot, but Partrey had him defeated from the start. He was a youngish individual, prematurely bald, with eyes that glittered metallically behind big lenses that added to the hypnotic effect of the eyes, rather than lessened it. He was big and powerfully built, and his jaws at the back were wide and bulbous— a certain sign of ruthlessness, to put it politely. He had a chin on him like the business end of a brassey. Obviously, in his way, a man with a personality.

If anything, the advent and appearance of Max added to the depression of the partners. It did not look as though there were any bargains to be picked up in the vicinity of Messrs. Levon and Partrey.

Nor, before dinner was half over, did the partners feel at all inclined to hunt for bargains. The meal was poor— inferior "raw material," cooked in an inferior manner.

The others seemed to notice very little wrong with it; but evidently they were no judges of food. Levon, in fact, appeared proud of the meal.

"Practically everything on the table is produced on the estate," he said enthusiastically, without the remotest idea that he was damning the estate beyond redemption in the eyes of the two experienced old vultures who were toying so mistrustfully with their food on either side of the table.

It was a dull meal, and the wine was not worth worrying about. And, if possible, the subsequent hour or so in the billiard-room, with what Smiler termed later "boss-eyed balls, bowlegged cues, and methylated whisky," was even duller. Partrey went off to the drawing-room to Miss Levon— to whom, stated their host, he was affiancéd— and after a strenuous but unsuccessful effort to steer the banker into a hook-beaked game of poker, the partners said "Good-night " and retired, each with what they described as "the hum."

"N. G.," observed Smiler briefy, removing his collar.

Fortworth agreed oathfully, and they parted.

DESPITE his inferior dinner, Mr. Bunn slept well— as usual. Or, father, he bade fair to sleep well, had he been left alone. But about an hour after dropping off" he woke with a start.

Someone was standing by his bed— Sing Song, his Chinese valet.

"You thundering quadruped!" he growled sullenly. "What d'ye mean—"

The Chink whispered sharply:

"Not makee noise, mastel— wakee you impoltant. Stlange place this house— stlange talkee downstails. Mistel Levon talkee Algentine— takee thousands— plentee hundled thousand pound away. You coming now— please coming listen?"

He plucked anxiously at the sleeve of Smiler's pyjamas.

"All, all right—all right! don't tear the shirt off my back," snapped Mr. Bunn with drowsy irritation. "Go and wake Mr. Black for a change!"

(It may be said that for reasons known to the police and half a million or so other people Lord Fortworth had modestly abandoned his title some years before.)

Sing Song faded out of the room noiselessly, like a Chinese ghost.

It was characteristic of both of the crooks that they dressed— half-dressed would better describe it— in darkness. Most men would have instinctively struck a match and lighted a candle. Not so the partners. Like Sing Song they could see in the dark well enough to suit themselves.

Preseritly, flitting before them like a great soundless yellow moth, Sing Song preceded them downstairs ; guided them through a _ ghostlylogking, sickly-smelling conserva~ tory, and out to the side of the house, cteeping

along, bent double. The partners, being a trifle too buxom, as it were, to bend very elaborately, went on all-fours— rather like big bears.

A few yards on Sing Song dropped to the ground, lying close in to the wall of the house, and the partners did the same. The manceuvre was executed with perfect silence and precision. Indeed, it had to be— for the three were now jammed up against the wall exactly under the wide-open window of the billiardToom, listening intently to the low-voiced conversation of Messrs. Levon and Partrey, who were sitting, smoking and talking, in the cool night air which poured in from the green, quiet park outside.

The trio could not have been separated from the two inside by more than a few feet, and they heard every word distinctly,

"Yes— the first way is best. You're right, Partrey. You will be run down, and I give you six weeks off for a rest cure in Germany," came the smooth voice of Levon (no longer breezy). "To make it public, give a sort of dinner with all the leading jackasses of the town present. You will be the guest of honour, and I hand you a presentation watch— as a token of esteem from the bank. Four weeks later I discover— by chance— that you've managed the bank so well that you've managed to make a clean bolt with practically everything realisable the bank's got. I'm ruined"— an evil little chuckle came from Levon as he spoke— "ruined but honest, and brave to the last. I'll stand by the ship, do the best I can, give up everything I've got— and face it out. Be a brave, heart-broken old man, silver hairs in sotrow, and all that. It'll take the best part of a year, Then, quietly, I'll drop out and join you and Catherine in the Argentine. We might get about eighty thousand each."

There was a pause,

Then Partrey said:

"Yes— it's easy. I'm game!"

They heard him clear his throat.

He went on:

"And now that's settled I may as well say that I've got about twenty thousand of the bank's money already stuck aside, and another twenty thousand sort of planned out—"

"The devil you have!" ejaculated that "brave, heart-broken old man" Levon surprisedly, to whom this was evidently news.

Partrey laughed a little.

"I have. Did you think I was honest? Fancy you thinking you could get an honest manager and general beast of burden for four hundred a year? You surprise me, Levon— you do, indeed. Man, if you hadn't come out with your cosy little scheme to-night, in a month's time I should have been far, far away across the deep blue sea, with thirty or. forty thousand of yours— or rather

your depositors. But that's all knocked on the head now. Your idea is the real goods. Iighty thousand apiece and a good four weeks' start to get away in, and nobody special on your track— why, which would you choose?"

The two frauds laughed heartily but softly together.

But they did not laugh quite so heartily as the Bunn-Fortworth Combine laughed ten minutes later, when they had regained the privacy of Smiler's room. It was all so very amusing,

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"IT'S UP TO us to grab Mr. Shifty Partrey on the hop," said Lord Fortworth as their car rolled away from Lowlake Park on the following afternoon.

Smiler Bunn nodded.

"On the hop's correct,'' he replied. " But we'll have to watch him from now onwards. I've got a kind of notion he'll try to land Levon in the cart. We'd better send Sing Song back to-night to do the watching."'

Fortworth agreed.

There had been no business done in the matter of the estate. The partners had left as soon as they decently could, promising to 'consider' the matter. They had spent the morning wandering about the place with Levon, rather listlessly listening to panegyrics of the place that were as clumsy as they were obviously untrue. The estate was a "dead one," as far as the Bunn Combine were concerned.

For some time there was silence in the interior of the big car. Then, presently, Smiler uttered the conclusion to which his somewhat protracted cogitation had brought him.

"The thing that puzzles me, Fortworth, is Catherine, What's Partrey going to burden himself with Catherine for when he hikes out for the Argentine with all that good money? He don't love her— not passionately, I mean. A baby could see that. And a man hasn't got to go fifty miles to find the reason. She's never going to win any beauty prizes, Fortworth, to put it politely, and if I'm any judge she ain't any sweeter in her disposition than she is in her features. She looks to me like one of these thirty-five-year-old spinsters that ain't above handing anyone who upsets her a pretty stiff dig to go on with. She's the sort that's catty and surly all the time— and somehow I can't see a man like Partrey breaking any devout lover records in her direction."

Fortworth grinned.

"Oh, he'll drop her overboard on the way out. What's a little thing like that to a stiff like him?" he responded airily, "I don't suppose he'll take her. And if Levon once lets him get a start for the Argentine with the money, Levon might

as well put in his old age singing, 'Good-bye for ever'— for he'll never hook on to Partrey or the money any more in this life."

Smiler nodded.

"Of course. But Levon knows that as well as you or me. He's got some hold over Partrey."

"Just so. But what good's a hold over a man if he's in the Argentine? That's where they go when they don't want to be held. I know about this Argentine skip trick— been on the verge of doing it myself many a time, Put it this way— Levon's going to let this Partrey grab practically all the bank's got and stroll off to South America with it. We can dismiss from our minds all that dope about Levon joining Partrey later on. There ain't going to be any 'joining later on' about it. Levon couldn't 'join' if he wanted to. Partrey wouldn't let him. See what I mean?"

Smiler nodded, his eyes gleaming.

"Yes. You're right. Levon's too sharp to think Catherine's man enough to watch Partrey all the time— in that country."

"He sure is." Fortworth lowered his voice. "Well, that means that Levon doesn't intend either Partrey or the money to go out of the country at all. But Levon intends to have the money, or at any rate his share, And to do that Partrey (and the money) have got to be in a safe place— within easy reach of Levon, while he faces the music at home. Well, we've only seen Partrey once, and we know just how safe he would be anywhere with money belonging to otker people in his possession— big money, I mean."

"He'd bolt, first chance."

Fortworth nodded.

"He would. Levon knows that, too. So, if you ask my opinion, Flood, Levon means to put Partrey in the one place where he will be safe. Hey, Flood?"

The ex-financier leaned closer, his face pale and hard, his little eyes glittering coldly.

"Underground!" breathed Mr. Bunn, tight-lipped.

Fortworth nodded again.

"That's how I work it out," he said.

It was Mr. Bunn's turn to nod, and he did so stiffly, his hard blue eyes fixed reflectively on his partner.

iii

SOME five weeks later there arrived at the "Royal Hart Hotel," in the busy South Coast town of Burchester, two gentlemen of prosperous appearance,

who intimated to the manager that they purposed staying a week at his establishment, and this being made clear, handed him a set of seven cards, each containing a tolerably elaborate dinner menu—being one for each day of their proposed visit.

"The wine," said one of them, "is in the car outside. You'd better send someone out to help the driver in with it."

"You must understand that it is the custom of my brother and myself to take our own wine wherever we go. We can't stand the bottled colic most hotels— not yours, but the others— sell," explained the other blandly,

But Messrs. Bunn and Fortworth had not lived in the hotel more than two days before the manager, despite the substitution of meagre "corkage" profits for the usual substantial wine profits, was congratulating himself upon having them.

"I don't know who they are, and I don't care," he confided to a crony. "They're the sort of visitors a man dreams about when business is bad. They're quiet, as long as they're left alone, sensible and rich. The best of everything is good enough for them, and— as long as it is the best, and there's enough of it— they don't care what it costs. Their wine is 'it.' If I had such wine as theirs I should do the same as they do— cart it about with me. They are the goods, and that's all I've got to say about it. Any one dinner of theirs would keep me a fortnight, and I'm not a careless eater. I like 'em— they're harmless, inoffensive, and rich. I wish the hotel was plastered with 'em. They've taken a great fancy to that Japanese gent that's been about the town the last month or two. He often calls on 'em. I don't know who he is— queer chap— kind of a Japanese priest, I heard someone say. Over here studying religion, I fancy. Well, what'll you have?"

He would have been a surprised manager if he had overheard the conversation which, at that same moment, was taking place on a lonely seat out on the esplanade between the visitors and the "Japanese priest"— as some bright young Burchester visionary had innocently described Sing Song, the Chinese valet and all-round "You, there!" of Smiler Bunn.

For they were talking business— in a very business-like manner.

Sing Song had by no means been idle. He appeared to have discovered, in his own peculiarly tortuous fashion, all that was necessary to discover about that popular Burchester banker, Mr. Randall Levon, and his size qua non, Mr, Max Partrey.

To-night was taking place the complimentary dinner to Mr. Partrey, which Levon and his manager had planned, and on the following evening Partrey was leaving for a three months' cure in Germany.

Miss Catherine Levon, curiously enough, was leaving for a few months' stay with friends in London, on the same day.

Everything was quite open and above-board, and there was many a Burchester tradesman dressing for the Partrey dinner that evening who felt inclined to envy the young bank manager whose future seemed so assured,

"Three months' holiday, then comes. home and marries Miss Levon ; another month's holiday, and then comes back to a partnership—yes, he's a lucky chap, Partrey," thought more than one mutton-headed old depositor in Levon's Bank to himself, scratching his whiskers and wondering vaguely why a wealthy banker never took an interest in Aim when he was young and handsome.

They, too, would have been interested in the conversation of the trio on the esplanade.

But the Bunn Combine were not the sort of men who permitted themselves to be overheard to any extent. So necessary did privacy appear that before their plans were completed they decided that in order to make secrecy absolutely certain it would be better to finish discussing things on the water.

"Can you row, Sing Song?" asked Smiler.

"Yes, mastel— plitty good."

"Go and hire a boat, then, and we'll row up the river a bit, and settle things there. Get a fair-sized boat with cushions. A little exercise will do you good and make you have a fine figure."

Some twenty minutes later they were sliding through the moonlight up the river, clear of the town. There, absolutely alone, they completed their plans.

It seemed from Sing Song's report that, despite the apparently smooth atrangement of Levon, Mr. Partrey was not going to find his. departure so free from complication as he expected. There was another lady likely to be involved in the affair— a stranger in Burchester, who had arrived in the town only a few days before. She was a handsome, worldly-looking woman, and evidently an old friend of Partrey. Sing Song had shadowed them one evening when they had walked out into the country, and overheard things.

"She mally Paltley long time ago— and he lun away flom her. Now she findee him and folgiving him. She wanting makee home togethel again," explained the Chink softly, steadying the boat in midstream with his oars. "She velly nice to him— but I thinkee she easy angly, and velly fielce when she getting angly."

Smiler nodded thoughtfully.

"Married already, is he? What d'you think, Fortworth ? We don't want any wild-cat butting in tomorrow night under the idea that Partrey's bolting because he wants to get away from her."

"No, that's true. But we've got to chance it. I don't think he ought to have much trouble in dodging her to-morrow night. He's a pretty shifty cuss anyway. And she'll probably think he will go straight to the station from his rooms—instead of going from Lowlake Park. So she'll wait for him in the town. Now we happen to know he's going to have lunch with Levon to-morrow and leave for London from there. He'll be far more likely to let Levon run him into Chestonbury Junction and take the train from there. Chestonbury is only half a mile from Lowlake, and it ain't very likely he'll come five miles back to Burchester to catch a train he could pick up at Chestonbury."

"Yes," Smiler agreed; "we can cross the lady off. She won't worry us. Probably she'll be on the train though, waiting to greet him at Chestonbury, But that'll be his funeral."

"Good! Now about getting the stuff—"

They talked in low tones for another half-hour, and then rowed back to the town.

iv

IF it were possible for a person to be gifted with the valuable power of being able to watch the movements of half-a-dozen different people in different places at the same time, suchanimprobableparty, had he been in the neighbourhood of Lowlake Park on the following evening, might have observed a number of interesting things. Among others he would have seen the following:—

A solitary woman, who, at about dusk, came riding a bicycle, on the toad from Burchester, passed in through the Lodge gates of Lowlake Park and disappeared along the coach-drive in the direction of the house.

But she did not continue to the end of the drive; at any rate, nobody about the house saw her.

The woman had not left the main road more than ten minutes before a fast-looking touring car came sliding, with the amazing silence of a Knight-engined, well-made machine, sto a standstill just beyond the gates of Lowlake. It was driven by a globular person with a fat, ruthless face— one Mr. Ferdinand Bloom, the butler and general man-of-all-work of the Bunn Combine's discreet country retreat at Purdston, on the Surrey-Hants border.

Beside Mr. Bloom sat the brassfaced "Japanese priest," Sing Song, the Chink, and in the roomy back of the car restfully reclined Smiler Bunn and ex-

Lord Fortworth. But as the motor, with a curious air of secrecy, ran smoothly to a standstill close in under the fence, the Combine threw off their restfulness.

"Now, you lemon," said Mr. Bunn sharply to Sing Song, "look alive!"

Two minutes later the three of them were over the fence, and, under the guidance of Sing Song, were hurrying across the park towards the house.

They vanished silently through a belt of trees, and came out at the front of the house, taking up their positions behind a great clump of ornamental grass.

There they waited.

"We'll give him an hour," whispered Smiler Bunn. "His train leaves Chestonbury at eight-thirty. If he's going by car he'll leave here about eight-fifteen. A few minutes to eight, if he's going to walk it. If he hasn't come out by eight-thirty he'll never come out at all."

"He'll come," breathed Fortworth. "Levon's not man enough to tackle him alone! Besides, it's too risky in his own house. If he's going to try any funny business with the man, Levon'll fix up so that it'll be done well away from the neighbourhood— on board the boat probably."

They stared at the lighted windows of the house.

"Go to it, Sing Song," said Smiler. "See what's happening."

The figure of the Chinaman glided across to the house like a moving shadow.

The partners waited. The darkness was falling rapidly now. In the woods across the park an owl began hooting-disconsolately, and the rising wind went hissing through the stiff blades of the pampas grass behind which the two crooks crouched, peering across at the lighted oblongs that were the windows of Levon's study. Once, for a fraction of a second, the outline of a peak-capped head was silhouetted blackly against one of the windows— that was Sing Song, craning to overhear the talk of the two men in the room. The queer, flatly-ringing, half-strangled note of a pheasant came across the drive to them— it sounded as though a hysterical contralto were choking out in the darkness.

Smiler peered at his watch.

"I give him another five minutes— if he's coming at all," he said in a hoarse whisper.

A shadow loomed silently up to his side.

"Thinkee him coming now— two men," came the low, sibilant whisper of the Chink.

A moment later the door of the hewse swung back and Partrey, carrying a bag, stepped out, Levon following him. No motor had appeared.

"They're going to walk it," said Fortworth tensely. "After 'em!"

The two men, smoking cigars, strolled down the wide curve of the drive before the house. They were laughing and seemed a little noisy. But to the watchers it sounded as though the mirth of neither rang very true.

Where the curve of the carriage approach straightened into the drive proper Levon tured sharply.

"We may as well take the short cut to the Junction," he said.

"Yes."

The banker disappeared along a footpath that ran in under the trees,

Partrey following him.

The Bunn Combine darted across the lawn after-him. But they had not traversed more than twenty yards of the footpath before Sing Song's hand went up and he stopped suddenly with a low warning hiss.

"Lady stopee them," he whispered.

Voices came filtering through the gloom to them— the shrill note of an angry woman, punctuated with the deeper sounds of man's speech. They listened.

The note of the woman grew shriller, and the Combine stole forward,

"You bolted once before— you bolted once before,' cried the woman, "and now you're bolting again! Ahl you hound— you never were to be trusted; Max Partrey— never! Why, only this moming you swore that when you left to-night I should come with you. But I never trusted you— I inquired— and when I found that your luggage was sent on ahead, I knew that you were at your old tricks. You haven't altered in eight years of prosperity, But eight years of poverty have altered me, Max, and I swear that you don't leave for London alone to-night. You are going to take me. Both of us go— or neither."

She paused, and the listeners heard the rapid mutter of Levon' s voice,

The high tones of the woman rose again.

"Who am I?" she said, evidently answering Levon's question. "I am his wife—his *wife*. That's who I am."

"Eh?" Levon's voice rose, "What's this, Partrey? What about Catherine? If you have a wife already—"

"It's a lie. The woman's crazy. I haven't any wife. You know that, Levon."

Partrey's voice sounded thick and murderous with rage..

"He's getting ugly— look out!" whispered Smiler.

"Lie?" The woman was half screaming. "Look at this, Mr. Levon. Tell Catherine— whoever she is— about this. Strike a match and see if this marriage certificate is a lie!"

"It's a forgery!" snarled Partrey, "Settle it between you. I've a train to catch. Levon, I'll write you."

"Wait !" The woman's voice had dropped again. "Do you swear that I am not your wife— that I have lied, and that this certificate is a forgery?" she asked.

"I do," said Partrey roughly. "Out of the way!"

By sheer instinct the Bunn Combine ducked— it was as though, skilled in human emotion as they were, they knew exactly what was going to happen.

And even as they ducked there was a metallic, ringing report and a sudden sharp glare of light, gone in an instant. Someone cried out thinly— it sounded like Levon, the banker— and then the report and flash again shocked the darkness.

Something fell crashing through the undergrowth, moaning,

"Oh, my God!"

The voice of Levon rose in a wail of terror.

"Back to the drive," hissed Smiler Bunn. "Quick! Quick!"

The Combine hurried down the footpath. They were just in time. As they emerged on the coach-drive the figure of the banker came flying out. He was shouting for help as he ran. He turned to the left towards. the house, never seeing the three figures which had turned to the right down the coach-drive.

"The bag! The bag!" gasped Fortworth.

"Mastel— this way— quick!"

Swift and silent as a wolf Sing Song darted back into the footpath. They hurried along it after him.

Partrey had fallen back into the undergrowth, and the woman, who had shot him and then herself, lay face down across the path. The bag which Partrey had been carrying lay on the edge of the undergrowth, just as it had fallen.

Smiler Bunn seized it— hesitated— then, as a sudden clamour broke out from the direction of the house— decided.

"The car, Sing!"

Clutching the bag, he plunged after the Chink down the footpath, Fortworth following. They cleared a stile some fifty yards on, then, Sing Song still guiding, turned sharply to the left, worked quickly through a belt of trees, and so emerged again into the path, now on the left-hand side of the coach-drive.

Behind them they saw lights flickering through the trees towards the spot where the woman who claimed to he the wife of Partrey had turned the woods into a gloomy setting of tragedy.

True to a hair, the amazing Chink led them straight across the park so that they reached the enclosing fence at the exact spot where— on the other side— Ferdinand Bloom waited with the car.

A moment later they were humming London-wards through the dark at a pace that only the vast white glare of the powerful electric lamps, suddenly switched on by Bloom, made possible.

It was a good quarter of an hour before they got their breath back.

Then Mr, Bunn spoke.

"That's the nearest shave I've ever had," he said, and wiped his face. "And as it is, I don't like it, somehow. It don't seem quite square to that woman— I don't know why—"

"Better see what we've made before you begin to pamper any conscience you've got left," said Fortworth.

So, twenty miles on, they pulled up, and in the light of a side-lamp examined their haul.

The bag contained foreign "bearer" bonds to the value of twenty thousand pounds— no more, no less,

It was a good coup, but somehow Mr. Bunn did not seem enthusiastic.

"But the figure was a hundred and eighty thousand,' he complained. "Heard Levon plan it with my own ears. Where's the balance, then— hundred and sixty thousand of good money? I'm no hog, but fair's fair. What's a measly twenty thousand out of a hundred and eighty?"

Lord Fortworth grinned.

"No," he said sarcastically, "you're no hog— I've noticed that about you before, old man. Hog! Certainly not. Give you the lot and you're satisfied. Not a word-of complaint does anybody ever get out of you— as long as you get the lot. Nothing of the hog about you— man alive! rhinoceroses are fools to you, not to mention hogs!"

Smiler's face cleared.

"Well, well, perhaps you're right— perhaps you're right," he agreed. "Only when a man says a hundred and eighty thousand, it kind of irritates me if he don't stick to a hundred and eighty thousand. However," he sighed, "' say no more— say no more." He turned to Sing Song, who had superseded Mr. Bloom at the wheel. "Hop it, Lemon!' he said.

And Lemon slipped in his gear and "hopped" it as requested.

IT WAS NOT till two or three days later that the partners satisfied themselves upon several points that had slightly worried them at first.

Neither Partrey nor his unexpected wife appeared to have been fatally wounded. Levon must have had influence with the local doctor, for nothing appeared in the press about the matter, except a short paragraph of the well-known "didn't-know-it-was-loaded" accident kind. It appeared that Partrey on

the eve of his travels had bought a revolver, and was showing it to Levon and a lady friend on the way to the station.

In due course Mr. Partrey took his holiday as arranged. He brought back a lady, whom he introduced as his wife— and the Bunn Combine, out of sheer curiosity, took the trouble to ascertain that she was the lady who had done the shooting. Evidently her "firmness" had cowed Partrey.

Catherine Levon, strangely enough, returned to Lowlake on the day following the "accident" in the woods. They found that out, too, and only then did they realise that unwittingly they had done Levon an injustice in their thoughts.

He had neither intended to trust Partrey with the bulk of the loot, nor to put him in that safe place— "underground." He had a simpler plan than that. Catherine was the one in whose possession the hundred and sixty thousand pounds was to remain until Levon joined them in hiding. Partrey's twenty thousaud was probably just the lowest that he would agree to take and hold on to until the final settlement.

But what struck the partners as the most amazing thing about it all was that the affair seemed to scare Levon and Partrey into honesty. At any rate, when, some four or five years later, the two crooks dropped in on Burchester in the course of a motor tour, Levon's Bank was still running, appeared to be doing good business with Partrey (now a junior partner), and Levon more popular among the townfolk than ever before, Levon was still trying to sell his estate, and, they learned, the fair Catherine was still unmarried.

“Queer, ain’t it?” said Smifer, as, rolling out of the town, they passed the bank. "Not a single party in the town knows what the town owes us. Practic’lly speaking, you may say, we saved half the town from bankruptcy? And nobody knows—"

“And nobody cares,” added Fortworth. "Not even us. We did a kind action and got twenty thousand out of Levon for doing it.”

Mr. Bunn nodded slowly; but his eyes had a far-away, wistful look in them. Perhaps he was thinking of the hundred and sixty thousand balance which ought to have been in Partrey’s bag— but was not.

Fortworth laughed, guessing what Mr. Bunn was thinking of.

“Forget it, old man,” he said coarsely.

“Forget what? ” feigned Smiler.

“The hundred and sixty thousand we didn’t get.”

Smiler Bunn sighed and smiled,

“I will,” he said.

But he never did.

4: The House of Silence

Scott Campbell

1858-1933

The Popular Magazine Dec 1906

"IS it possible that you mean, Doctor Vantoon, that the missing girl is deaf and dumb?" Felix Boyd's brows were elevated in surprise.

"Yes, that is precisely what I mean."

"She is one of your patients?"

"She is."

"Deaf and dumb— is it possible? This adds to the gravity of the matter."

"I now am sure, Mr. Boyd, that you fully appreciate the extreme urgency of the case, as well as the many reasons for my anxiety. My reputation and that of my house are seriously threatened. The welfare of this sadly afflicted girl, if not her life and honor, may also be at stake, which is a far more serious matter. I am completely unnerved by the terrible occurrence. I am so affected by her disappearance and by the alarming possibilities which—"

Felix Boyd checked him with a gesture, not a little moved by the agitation of the venerable specialist. There is always something irresistibly pathetic in the grief and distress of old age; and the aspect of Doctor Dudley Vantoon, while stating the occasion for his appeal to Felix Boyd that autumn morning, was extremely pitiable. His exceeding paleness, his choked voice and tearful eyes, the nervous trembling of his gray head and slender white hands— even Coleman, the Central Office man, despite his habitual grim apathy, was affected by these signs of the famous physician's distress.

"Unless you calm yourself, doctor, we may waste valuable time," Boyd now protested with considerate gentleness. "If I am to look into this matter for you with any hope of success, you must state the circumstances as briefly and correctly as possible. Who is this missing patient, and when was her absence discovered ?"

The protest was not without effect upon Doctor Vantoon, in the library of whose suburban establishment the three men were seated— Boyd and Jimmie Coleman having arrived only a few minutes before. From the windows one could see the Hudson, glistening in the sunlight of the October morning, and the trees of a surrounding park, and the beautiful grounds of a large estate situated on the bank of the river, a hundred yards distant.

There are many who will recall, some with profound gratitude for the services done them by the eminent specialist, Doctor Vantoon's private home for the treatment of the deaf and dumb. His world-wide fame, his remarkable professional achievements, his enviable distinction as a man of many humanitarian impulses, and the reputation of his splendid establishment— all

seem to require hardly cursory mention even. That something most extraordinary had occurred to affect him so seriously was only too obvious.

"You are right, Mr. Boyd, and I will govern my feelings," he now hastened to reply. "The name of the missing girl is Honora Klein, and her absence was discovered about seven o'clock this morning."

"Well, well, it now is only ten, so not much time has been lost," said Boyd encouragingly. "I hastened up here immediately after receiving your telephone-call. First, tell me something about the girl. Who is Miss Klein, and how long has she been a patient here ?"

"She is an only child of the late Jacob Klein, a wealthy New York brewer, who died about four years ago. The girl has been deaf and dumb since her birth, yet of late— I may say it with pardonable pride, Mr. Boyd, I am sure— of late I have seen indications that the sense of hearing and the power of speech may, under my methods of treatment, ultimately be acquired by her."

"I have heard of your marvelous achievements in that line, Doctor Vantoon," bowed Felix Boyd. "I would suggest, however, that you stick close to the point. How old is Miss Klein, and how long has she been here?"

"She is nearly twenty, and has been here about two years," Doctor Vantoon quickly answered. "Her father left her a fortune of nearly two hundred thousand dollars, which is held in trust for her until her twentieth birthday by the law firm of Abel Matfield & Son, the elder Matfield having been an intimate friend and the legal adviser of the girl's father. She is—"

"One moment," interrupted Boyd. "Are both of her parents dead?"

"Yes. Both of them came from Germany many years ago, and Honora is without relatives in this country."

"Do you know her exact age?"

"She will be twenty in about two months, I believe."

"And has been a patient here for about two years?"

"Nearly that. She lived with the Matfields for about two years after her father's death, Abel Matfield becoming her guardian and adviser, and it was at his suggestion that she came here for treatment. Naturally, Mr. Boyd, he takes a fatherly interest in the afflicted girl, and has watched over her with exceeding care. I dread meeting him after what has occurred, yet I already have notified him by telephone of the deplorable facts. I expect him to arrive here at any moment. He has repeatedly urged me to keep a watchful eye on his ward."

"Was there any special reason for watching Miss Klein?" Boyd asked.

"Her guardian appeared to think so, yet I am convinced, on the other hand, that the girl is possessed of an exemplary character. She is very pretty, and has

a most gentle and lovable nature. It is not easy to think that one so grievously afflicted as Miss Klein can have any very vicious inclinations."

"Assuredly not," declared Boyd, "Do you know why her guardian thinks so, and urged you to watch her so carefully ?"

"Yes, yes, he explained that," Vantoon nervously rejoined. "It appears that the girl is in love with a young lawyer; a man who, despite her infirmities, is said to have a very profound affection for her. Their friendly relations date back to the time her father was living, and I am told that he did not oppose them. Matfield does, however, in view of the girl's afflictions; and there has been some little estrangement between them because of it Yet Matfield has visited her each week, and appears very sincere in the advice he gives her."

"Quite naturally," nodded Boyd. "Who is the young lawyer?"

"His name is Thomas Lovejoy. His home is in Yonkers, a few miles below on the east side of the river. So far as I have been able to learn, he is a man of excellent character and much ability."

"Have you ever met him, Doctor Vantoon?"

A tinge of color rose over the physician's pale face, yet he quickly bowed his gray head and answered:

"Yes, frequently, Mr. Boyd. I will confess that my fondness for Miss Klein has led me to be perhaps unwarrantably indiscreet."

"How so, doctor?"

"I have, despite her guardian's instructions, allowed Miss Klein to receive occasional visits from Lovejoy."

"Ah, I see!"

"Knowing that the girl would soon arrive at the age when Matfield's guardianship would expire, and feeling sure that the love of the young couple was honorable and sincere, my sympathy for Miss Klein has led me to disregard her guardian's commands. To me it seemed most cruel to oppose the love of one into whose life so little of the romantic could be expected to enter. For the house of my patients is, as you easily can imagine, Mr. Boyd, a house of silence— a silence like that of a tomb; never a sound heard; never a word spoken! Who, indeed, would have the heart to bar the hope of heaven from a girl so sadly afflicted; the heaven which comes of an honorable love? Yet I now am forced to believe that this unfortunate girl has been outrageously misled by Lovejoy, and that he has been knave enough to abduct her. If that is true, Mr. Boyd, and—"

"Is there any further evidence of it?" Boyd abruptly demanded, drawing forward his chair. "Let's get at the bare circumstances surrounding Miss Klein's departure. When was she last seen here, Doctor Vantoon?"

His curtness, his attitude of intense interest, the sharper gleam in the depths of his frowning eyes— all indicated that he was somewhat moved by the pathetic remarks of the physician. The Central Office man, who had been listening in grim silence, smiled as he noted the change, the significance of which he readily appreciated.

Doctor Vantoon hastened to state the circumstances.

"Miss Klein is known to have been in her room at ten o'clock last evening," said he. "She is one of nine patients who have rooms on the second floor of the east wing of the house. That entire wing is under the care and supervision of a female attendant, Miss Jane Randall, who has been in my service for several years, and whose private room adjoins Miss Klein's. From Miss Randal's room there is a stairway leading down to a door at the extreme end of the east wing, by which way Miss Klein evidently departed."

"I infer, then, that it was necessary to pass through the attendant's room in order to reach the stairway mentioned."

"Yes, Mr. Boyd."

"And Jane Randall is the only attendant in the east wing?"

"Yes. There is electric communication between her room and mine, however, in case of need."

"Where is your room located, Doctor Vantoon?"

"In the main part of the house, directly over my front office. The east wing was added several years ago, and is occupied only by female patients."

"Nine in all, I think you said?"

"Yes,"

"Are all of them deaf and dumb?"

"They are, Mr. Boyd."

"Then Jane Randall is the only person in that wing who could have heard Miss Klein's movements," remarked Boyd, with an odd glance at the Central Office man. "A house of silence, indeed, Jimmie. Only deaf ears in that east wing— barring two! Only dumb lips, Jimmie, from' which no cry of alarm could have issued. Yes, yes, a house of silence, indeed. The conditions certainly were most favorable for the girl's departure, and for the cooperation of her confederate, assuming that Doctor Vantoon's suspicions are correct."

"I should say so, Felix," growled Coleman, with a grim nod of assent. "They couldn't have been much better."

"By the way," added Boyd, reverting quickly to the aged physician, "could Miss Klein easily have left the house by any of the doors ordinarily used?"

"No, far from it," Vantoon hastened to explain. "To have done so, Mr. Boyd, she would have had to come down the stairs from the east wing and then pass through the main hall of the house. That is always lighted at night,

with an attendant in charge at all hours, and the girl could not possibly have evaded detection."

"As a matter of fact, then, the rear stairway available from Miss Randall's room was the only way left her?"

"That is right, Mr. Boyd, and we know that she went that way."

"How so, doctor?"

"Because the rear door was found unlocked this morning, despite that it is very seldom used. In a foot-path leading toward the river, moreover, are the prints of shoes corresponding in size and style with those worn by Miss Klein; also other impressions which obviously were left by a man, presumably her companion. We know that they must have been made late last night, Mr. Boyd, for there was a heavy shower in the early evening, which would have obliterated them if they then had existed."

"Are they still discernible?"

"I think so."

"Let's go out and have a look at them," said Boyd, abruptly rising. "Come with us, Jimmie. They may suggest something worthy of note, and very possibly reveal the course taken by the culprits. A culpable act, indeed, this abduction of a deaf and dumb girl. Lead the way, doctor. I'm rather surprised that the movements of Miss Klein were not heard by Jane Randall, when she was in the latter's room. Persons having the care of others are light sleepers and quick to hear the slightest sound in the night."

"That is very true, Mr. Boyd, and ordinarily Jane is no exception," Vantoon replied, as he led the way through the hall. "Last night, however, she did something very unusual. Feeling strangely drowsy about ten o'clock, she lay down on her couch for a few moments, intending to disrobe for bed a little later. She fell asleep almost immediately, however, and was found there at seven o'clock this morning by one of the chambermaids whose duties took her to that wing of the house, and who noticed that the lamp in the attendant's room had not been extinguished."

"Had Miss Randall been lying on the couch all night?"

"Yes. She still was dressed, and appeared to be in a deep stupor, from which she was aroused only with some difficulty. She cannot account for the strange experience, the like of which never occurred before, and she now feels her position very keenly."

"She is entirely trustworthy, I infer."

"I have not the slightest doubt of that," Vantoon gravely rejoined. "She has been in my employ nearly five years, and I have never known her to neglect her duties. She has been faithful in every respect."

"Then it rather looks to me as if— but I'll get at that later," Boyd abruptly broke off. to add, as the three men rounded a corner of the main house and proceeded toward the east wing.

He appeared perplexed by these disclosures, if one were to judge by his frowning eyes, yet he checked a remark that Coleman was about to make, and then gave his entire attention to a view of the surroundings and the evidence mentioned by Doctor Vantoon. .

The east wing was only a two-story, wooden structure built out from the main part of the house, and Boyd halted only briefly at an open door in the extreme end of it, merely glancing into the narrow lower entry and up the stairs leading to the room which adjoined Miss Randall's.

Then, with head bowed and hands in his pockets, he fell to studying the foot-path mentioned, following it straight away from the door and across a strip of lawn, then off to the rear of a stable some fifty yards from the house, at which point it diverged abruptly toward the river, passing near a vine-covered, rustic summer-house half-hidden amid clumps of shrubbery and tall lilac-bushes; and finally ending at a small stone landing at the bank of the stream.

Boyd paused only twice to inspect the path more closely, once at a point where a patch of yellow clay appeared amid the surrounding grass, and in which the faint footprints at intervals discernible were a little more sharply outlined.

"Doctor Vantoon is right, Jimmie," he remarked, glancing up while he knelt to examine them. "The girl came this way, there's no doubt of that. Note this impression left by a French heel and a narrow sole. Miss Klein wore a fashionable shoe, Jimmie. Here is one left by a much broader heel, moreover, evidently that of her companion, as the doctor has inferred. Well, well, and here is— humph! there's no doubt of it. They certainly came this way."

Vantoon responded only with a nod, while Coleman made no reply at all. Neither noticed the sudden flash in Boyd's eyes. The opinion he had expressed was not in the least surprising, it being that at which Doctor Vantoon had arrived; yet both were a bit puzzled by a move which Felix Boyd made before he arose from his crouching attitude on the greensward.

He passed his hand lightly over the grass near-by, then glanced at his palm. It was slightly soiled with particles of the yellow clay, with which the shower of the previous evening had besprinkled the surrounding grass, Before Coleman could ask the question that rose to his lips, however, Boyd quickly inquired, yet with seeming indifference:

"Do you employ any stable-hands, doctor?"

"Yes, one," replied Vantoon, wondering.

"What is his name?"

"James Grady."

"Does he sleep in the stable?" asked Boyd, as he continued to follow the path toward the river.

"Yes. He has a room in the loft."

"Have you asked him whether he saw or heard anybody out here last night?"

"I have, Mr. Boyd, and he heard nothing unusual."

"Do you keep a dog?"

"No."

"Nor a boat?" queried Boyd, halting near the landing mentioned, which consisted of only a few large rocks laid out from the low edge of the bank.

"No, I have no boat," replied Vantoon, shaking his head. "My patients have the run of the grounds, which cover nearly three acres, but I oppose their venturing on the river. No boats ever land here, Mr. Boyd, that I am aware of."

Despite this assertion, the eyes of Felix Boyd lingered briefly on a small black spot on the side of one of the rocks, then on a slight, angular indentation in the overhanging sod along the edge of the bank, either of which might have been left by a small black skiff, and at no very remote time.

Boyd made no remark about them, however. He stood gazing across the sunlit river for several minutes, then at the trees and shrubbery which grew more thickly in this locality, and finally at the distant house and the long east wing, partly hidden by the rise of the intervening land.

"Let's return," he presently said, quite abruptly. "I want a few words with your attendant, Jane Randall, before I express my opinion of this most unfortunate— ah! if I am not mistaken, doctor, your friend Matfield and his son have arrived from the city. Two gentlemen are hurrying this way. By the looks of the elder, he is quite as deeply exercised as you anticipated, doctor."

ii

FOLLOWED by his companions, Felix Boyd had mounted to the higher ground somewhat back from the river while he was speaking, where he halted upon seeing the two strangers approaching through the park. A furtive glance at Doctor Vantoon's pale face was a very significant voucher to their identity.

The elder of the two was a tall, angular man of sixty years, with a gaunt, yellowish face, a pair of fiery gray eyes under shaggy eyebrows, and a nose hooked like the beak of a vulture. In his hand he carried a heavy cane, which he already was shaking with vicious asperity; while at his side strode a broad-shouldered, flashily dressed fellow of thirty, with a type of countenance plainly

revealing their relationship. Judging from their looks, they were a pair few men would have cared to oppose single-handed.

"Yes, yes, it's Matfield!" Doctor Vantoon faintly gasped, instinctively drawing nearer to Boyd. "I knew that he'd be very angry. I fear that he may go so far as to—"

Before he could complete his apprehensive remarks, to which Boyd indifferently listened, the rasping voice of the elder Matfield interrupted him.

"What's this I am told—what's this, you negligent old donkey?" he frothed and snarled while still approaching. "My ward missing— abducted— lured away by that accursed, presumptuous Yonkers lawyer! Stolen from under your very nose! Didn't I warn you? Haven't I told you, you egregious old ass, that you might expect no less? I've a mind to break every bone in your skin, you white-headed, negligent old idiot!"

He appeared, in fact, about to execute his threat, for he had raised his heavy cane above the head of the shrinking physician.

Boyd's long arm suddenly was extended, however, and with a quick twist of his hand and wrist he whipped the cane out of Matfield's grasp and tossed it upon the ground.

"That will be about enough, my friend," he said quietly. "Cut it out, or I shall hand you something you may not fancy."

Matfield swung round ablaze and lips twitching.

"Why do you interfere?" he cried, with a snarl like that of a wolf. "Who are you that you—"

"My name is Boyd—Felix Boyd, sir. Possibly you've heard it before. You are Mr. Abel Matfield, I take it, and this your son, Mr. Jonas Matfield. Shake hands, both of you, with Detective Coleman of the Central Office. You'll not blame me, I'm sure, for opposing violence upon this old gentleman, despite that he has slipped a cog in losing hold of your unfortunate and with eyes misguided young ward. The proper move now, my dear Matfield, is to get on the track of the couple without delay, and, if possible, arrest them. Don't you think I am right, sir?"

There was no resisting Felix Boyd at such a moment. His insinuating personal magnetism, his attitude of quiet determination, a certain subtle threat in his incisive yet half-bantering voice— these and the disclosure of his identity, with that of Detective Coleman, combined to take most of the bluster out of the elder Matfield.

"Yes, yes, cut it out, dad," cried young Jonas Matfield. "There's nothing in abusing this old man, though he's been a bit lax in obeying your instructions. That he is anxious to make amends appears in the fact that he already has two

detectives on the case. You're quite right, Mr. Boyd, and I'm sure the governor will agree with you."

"I hope so, young man, I'm sure," smiled Boyd.

Abel Matfield, who had hastened to recover his cane, now took the only wise course left open for him.

"Well, well, no doubt you're right," he agreed, still growling churlishly and glaring from one to another. "Yet your negligence is inexcusable, Vantoon. I repeatedly warned you of this. I told you that that infernal young lawyer 39

"Who told you, Mr. Matfield, that we suspect Miss Klein to have been abducted by Lovejoy?" interrupted Boyd.

"I was told at the house," declared Abel Matfield, pointing with his cane. "I also was informed where I should find you."

"Ah, I see!"

"Who else, indeed, could have lured my ward away? There is no other reasonable explanation of the girl's conduct, nor any other person who would thus have misled her. She—"

"I think you are right in that, Mr. Matfield," Boyd again interrupted, with an assenting nod. "The sooner we finish our investigations, then, the better."

"What further investigations are necessary?" Matfield petulantly demanded.

"I wish to be absolutely sure that I am on the right track, sir, before I get after this recreant couple."

"Why do you delay for that? How can you doubt that you are on the right track, when every particle of evidence points to—"

"I don't doubt it," snapped Boyd, with an impatient gesture. "But I must have something more than particles of evidence. I must have positive evidence of it, Mr. Matfield; such evidence as I can use to advantage. I shall not be long in acquiring it, I think, and you may come with me, if you like. Haste makes waste, as you've probably heard, and I shall insist upon running this affair in my own way, or not at all."

"Well, well, that's right enough," growled Matfield. "Don't go into the air over it."

"Oh, shut up, dad!" broke in Jonas brutally. "Mr. Boyd is right; perfectly right."

"We'll return to the house, Doctor Vantoon," added Boyd. "As I said before, sir, I want a few words with Miss Randall. Will you come?"

Both lawyers accepted the invitation, and followed close at his heels, the elder grumbling and growling all the while, and anathematizing the distressed and humiliated physician.

Boyd paid very little attention to either of them, however; and the Central Office man, though he wondered at what the former was driving, maintained his habitual grim and discreet silence. At the wing door, Boyd turned back to the physician and said:

"Can we go up to Miss Klein's room by these stairs, Doctor Vantoon?"

"Yes, by passing through' Jane's room."

"I'll ask you to lead the way, if you please," smiled Boyd. "After you, gentlemen! This is capital fall weather, Matfield, isn't it?"

"Much too good for such bad business," snarled Abel Matfield, as he stumped through the entry and up the narrow, uncarpeted stairs.

Mr. Felix Boyd was the last to enter. He glanced sharply after the others, then bent quickly, and with his hand wiped from the wall base-board near the door a faint smirch of yellowish clay, which had been observed by him when he glanced into the entry some twenty minutes before. The action was seen by none of his companions, however, and he was close upon their heels when Doctor Vantoon led them through the upper entry and into the room occupied by Jane Randall, a square, neatly furnished apartment, obviously that of a woman of very good taste.

She entered from an adjoining room at the same moment, a graceful, well-formed woman of thirty, with dark hair and eyes, thin lips, and a somewhat sallow complexion. She bowed— nervously, Boyd thought— when she beheld Abel Matfield's frowning face; but Doctor Vantoon hastened to prevent any further outbreak from the latter by saying quickly:

"Here is the attendant, Mr. Boyd. She will answer any questions you may wish to ask. Are you feeling better, Miss Randall?"

The woman smiled faintly. "Somewhat better, doctor. My mind still is a little dazed— I really cannot account for it. If I was addicted to drugs or sleeping-potions, I might attribute to them my unusual—"

"Possibly you took something of the kind without knowing it, Miss Randall," suggested Boyd, interrupting her with a grave smile.

"Without knowing it, sir?"

Miss Randall's dark brows rose inquiringly, while Abel Matfield started slightly and stared.

"I've been told how you passed the night; also that Miss Klein's room adjoins your own," Boyd quickly added. "I presume that is the door between the rooms ?"

"Yes, sir, it is."

"Did you eat or drink anything last night which Miss Klein gave you, or prepared for you? It is quite possible that she—"

"I hope you don't imply," snarled Abel Matfield, glaring fiercely at Boyd, "that my ward would have drugged this woman."

"I should say not," supplemented his son. "That's absurd!"

"Not so absurd as you think," declared Boyd, with a derisive laugh. "Your ward, Mr. Matfield, is possessed of some little craft and cunning, despite her physical afflictions, or she could not have hoodwinked you and others so effectively. You have not answered my question, Miss Randall."

The curtness of the last brought quite a hurried response from the listening woman. She colored deeply, and replied :

"Why, yes, Mr. Boyd, I did. I ate some candy which Miss Klein brought into my room and offered me just before she retired."

"Aha! is that so?" cried Boyd. "Was that something unusual?"

"She nearly always came in to bid me good night, sir."

"I refer to the candy."

"Yes, yes, that was unusual, I'll admit, stammered Miss Randall "I really did not wish for any, but she begged me to eat just one piece, so I complied, and— "

"Begged you, eh? Just one piece, eh?" Boyd sharply interrupted. "Well, that's most significant. Do you know when and where she got the candy?"

"It came to her by mail, sir, yesterday afternoon."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Certainly I am. The box still is in her room; also the wrapper in which—"

"Let me see them! Let me see them at once— pardon my bruskness! It's my way when I'm engaged in work of this kind. Let me see the— oh! so this is the stuff, eh?"

With an asperity bordering on rudeness, and with a mingling of satisfaction and triumph as if already he had fixed upon the missing girl some really heinous transgression, Boyd had brushed Jane Randall aside and strode into the adjoining room, where he was quickly joined by his several startled observers, and had seized from the dressing-table a fancy box of chocolates and bonbons, and the cover still lying near it.

"Blank, eh?" he cried, glancing at the cover. "It's a pity that we haven't the confectioner's name. You'd better hang onto this stuff, Jimmie. We'll learn later whether it contains any drug. Look after it, please."

"I reckon the drug's here, all right," said Coleman, gazing into the box.

"Yes, yes, no doubt of it, Jimmie. What did you say, Miss Randall, about the wrapper? Is it—"

"It is here in the waste-basket. I noticed it when about putting the room in order, and I—"

"Let me see it— let me see it," cried Boyd, with an impatience that gave others but few opportunities to speak. "It bears the Yonkers postmark, and is inscribed with a pen. Do you know this hand, Miss Randall? Or you, doctor? It may be that of— wait a bit! Here's Miss Klein's desk, and we may find something even better than your judgment— the hand of the man himself. One look would settle the matter. If we could find a letter from— yes, this should be the very one. Postmarked Yonkers— signed by Lovejoy— hand the same; why— why, Jimmie, there's nothing to it! See for yourself, Mr. Matfield, and then deny, if you will, that your ward was crafty!"

Talking all the while with a rapidity exceeded only by his swift, energetic movements, Boyd had darted to an open desk near the window, snatched a package of loose letters from one of the pigeonholes, run through them till he found one bearing the Yonkers postmark; and then, upon opening it and finding a missive signed by Thomas Lovejoy, he had clapped both the open letter and the wrapper upon the desk, while he called the attention of his hearers to the similarity between the two writings.

"Nothing to it— I should say not, Felix!" exclaimed Coleman, gazing over Boyd's shoulder. "They were written by the same hand, that's evident."

"I am compelled to admit the likeness," muttered Abel Matfield, in accents of much chagrin. "Yet I could not have believed this of Honora. Do you really think, Mr. Boyd, that—"

"I think," cried Boyd, starting to his feet, "that Lovejoy mailed your ward the candy, and that she knew it to be drugged, and pressed it upon the attendant, only with a design to insure her sleeping so soundly that her own movements would not be heard and her departure prevented."

"Sure thing!" cried Coleman.

"It certainly appears so," Doctor Vantoon sadly admitted.

"Well, well, what's to be done?" Matfield harshly demanded, impatiently banging the floor with his cane. "Are you going to stand here till doomsday and let that rascal escape with—"

"No, no, I'll presently get after him," Boyd hurriedly interrupted. "You, Jimmie, step down to the doctor's telephone, and see if you can get in communication with Lovejoy. That's still barely possible, you know. If not, Jimmie, I'll give you a line to the Yonkers chief of police, and start you after the couple. I've another short line to follow in this locality."

As Coleman hastened from the room, having learned by experience not to get in the way of any move that Felix Boyd might be making, Abel Matfield, stumping hurriedly after the Central Office man, cried: "Hold on, sir! I'll go with you! If you succeed in ringing up that scoundrel, I'll have a word with him— that I will! that I will!"

As if also impelled by this bare possibility, Jonas Matfield and the physician hastened after the two; and Felix Boyd suddenly found himself alone with Jane Randall— precisely as he had designed. He turned to the dark-eyed, watching woman, and said, smiling agreeably:

"That elder Matfield is a rancorous old chap, isn't he? This is bad business, however, and one can hardly blame him."

"Bad business?— yes, decidedly so," Miss Randall gravely agreed. "I could not have dreamed of such a deplorable affair."

"I presume there are other patients on this floor?" queried Boyd, glancing into the adjoining corridor.

"Oh, yes; several."

"I would like to ask them— but I forgot; they are deaf and dumb. I have no art of conversing with my fingers, as I presume you have. Would you mind asking for me, Miss Randall, whether they saw any person in the grounds last night? One of them may possibly have been looking from her window during the night."

The woman hesitated for the bare fraction of a second, with her dark eyes fixed upon his, then: "Certainly, Mr. Boyd, I will do so," she said.

"Thank you very much, Miss Randall. Meantime I will see if I can find any further clue here that might serve me."

As the woman withdrew, Boyd's countenance changed like a flash. His look of bland suavity vanished. With lips suddenly compressed, he darted silently into Jane Randall's room, where he hurriedly examined the lower edge of several gowns and skirts in the closet, then several pairs of shoes lying on the floor. He studied with hurried glances a pile of folded newspapers on a stand in one corner; and one of these— the top one— he presently thrust into his hip pocket, and then returned to Miss Klein's room.

There he drew out his note-book and wrote a few lines on one of the blank pages; and, having replaced the book, sauntered indifferently into the adjoining hall.

Jane Randall, with rapidly moving fingers, was conversing with a group of young women near one of the corridor windows. Upon seeing Boyd, she hastened to join him, saying quickly:

"They can give me no information, Mr. Boyd. None of them were out of bed after retiring last night."

"I hardly hoped for anything important, smiled Boyd. "Nevertheless, Miss Randall, I'm greatly obliged to you."

"Not in the least, I assure you."

"I now will go down and rejoin the others. I think I must start Detective Coleman after this couple without further delay."

Boyd found Coleman and his companions in the physician's office, and saw at a glance that nothing had been accomplished.

"Can't raise him, eh?" he cried, as he entered.

"No, he has no phone," growled Coleman. "His office is in town, but I can get no answer from—"

"Well, well, it does not matter, Jimmie," Boyd curtly interrupted, drawing out his note-book and pretending to write a line, then tearing out the page. "Here's a word to the Yonkers chief. You'd better go over there at once and see what you can learn. You may join me here about noon, or telephone any important information."

"And you, Felix?"

"Oh, I want to make some further inquiries," Boyd hurriedly rejoined. "I'm led to think that Lovejoy may have taken the girl across the river, in which case I may be able to locate some boatman who saw them, and who may put me definitely on their track. Be that as it may, Jimmie, you start for Yonkers at once, and report as soon as possible. I shall be here again before noon. As for you, Mr. Matfield, you may await our return, or I will telephone you of any developments."

Coleman had already left the house, and could be seen hurrying down the long gravel driveway leading out of the extensive grounds.

For several moments Abel Matfield stared doubtfully at Boyd, then blustered vehemently:

"Telephone nobody! I'll wait here till you return. I must know what you learn and what you intend doing."

"Very good— very good!" exclaimed Boyd approvingly. "I shall not be absent longer than an hour or two. It then will be nearly noon, doctor, when a bite to eat will be in order, if you'll be so kind. So-long, gentlemen, till I see you again!"

iii

AN HOUR after Felix Boyd's departure, Abel Matfield, having worried Doctor Vantoon into a state approaching nervous distraction, set forth with his son to inspect the foot-path leading to the river, ostensibly with a view to measuring for themselves the evidence upon which Mr. Felix Boyd had based his opinion.

Strange to relate, the face of each now wore a complacent and self-satisfied expression, which did not vanish until, when well out of view from the house, and nearly down to the bank of the stream, the eyes of Jonas Matfield suddenly lighted upon a man who was paddling a miserable little wherry in

close proximity to the scattered shrubbery skirting the bank, and who was acting for all the world like one bent upon some rascally mission.

His personal appearance, moreover, seemed to warrant such a suspicion. He was a dark-featured fellow, with a short, brown beard and a pair of sunken, black-ringed eyes that boded no good. His clothes smacked of the sea, but they were greasy and in sore need of repair. He saw the Matfields at the same moment that Jonas saw him, and at once ran the nose of his wherry to the bank, then calmly shipped his oars.

"Who the devil's that fellow, dad?" Jonas muttered, instinctively halting.

"What fellow do you mean, Jonas? Humph! I'm blessed if I know!" said Abel Matfield, upon beholding him. "He looks like a boatman."

"He looks to me more like a crook," growled Jonas. "You don't suppose that infernal detective is right, do you?"

"Right in what, Jonas?"

"In thinking some one saw the girl abducted."

The elder Matfield changed color and uttered a half-smothered oath.

"No, it's not likely," he replied, nervously gripping his cane. "If that were so, Jonas— the devil! that hobo is landing!"

With his rounded shoulders hunched forward, and his woollen cap drawn over his brow, the boatman had sprung . ashore and dropped the painter of his wherry over a tree-stump. After several sharp glances to right and left, he startled his two observers by significantly jerking his thumb toward the rustic summer-house, which offered a capital shelter from probable observation, and by crying with a remarkably hoarse and wheezy voice, much as if his vocal pipes were filled with night mists and river fogs:

"Bear off a bit and slip under cover. I've a word for the ears of you two which you'd better harken to. Look lively, too, afore I'm spotted from the house. Get a move on, d'ye hear?"

He halted in the doorway of the rustic house, which was little more than a huge, vine-covered arbor, and impatiently signed for them to follow him.

"What did he have the impudence to say, Jonas?" demanded Abel Matfield, with affected haughtiness. "Did you understand him?"

"I reckon we'd better understand him, dad, for sure," Jonas pointedly retorted, with an ugly frown. "He's wise to something; you can go the limit on that."

As if the suggestion carried with it some alarming possibility, Abel Matfield gripped his cane more firmly, and quickly approached the arbor, into the deeper shadows of which the boatman had now retreated.

"What do you mean, sir?" Matfield demanded as he entered. "What are you doing here, you rascal, and why—"

"Stow it— stow it, old cock!" interrupted the boatman, who was crouching to peer cautiously between some vines he was parting with his begrimed hands. "Stow it, I say, or mebbe you'll wish you had."

"Wish I had, you infernal ruffian! Do you mean—"

"Just what I say." The interruption silenced the choleric old lawyer. "D'ye think I've been skulking around here all this morning fur nothing? Not much, boss, as you'll find out before long— so be it your ugly heads ain't as fur from level as the uglier game you're playing."

"Game we're playing!" frothed Abel Matfield, beginning to brandish his cane. "Are you mad? Do you dare assert that we—"

"Are two sports who ain't on the level— sure I do!" the boatman interrupted again, and leered horribly. "Take a bit of advice, too, before it's too late, the which a river-rat about my cut of cloth can give you. Not all the ears around here are deaf, boss, and that noisy tongue of your'n may get you two grafters into trouble."

"The fellow's right, dad," cautioned Jonas, when his father appeared about to break forth again. "Let's hear what he's got to say. He'd not venture to speak thus without some reason."

This hurriedly given advice was not without effect upon Abel Matfield. He swallowed his wrath, and demanded, now with his rasping voice somewhat lowered :

"What do you mean, you thieving scoundrel? Why do you address us in this fashion?"

The boatman perched himself on the corner of a bench near which he had been standing, and dangled one of his dripping boots over the edge.

"Don't call a chap hard names, my noble lord!" he protested. "Mebbe you've not heard as how chickens come home to roost. I could have told that smooth guy I've noticed around here this morning— I could have spun him the yarn I've been keeping for the ears of you two lovely lobsters. I reckoned you'd shape a course out here, you two alone, so I hung around out of sight until you showed up."

"Whom do you mean by a smooth guy?" Jonas frowningly demanded.

"Him as you two met an hour back, along with the feller as runs the home fur the deafs and dumbs. I had 'em under my peepers when you two hove in sight, and easy enough I could have told 'em what came of the gal who—"

"Stop a moment!" commanded Abel Matfield, much more calmly than he yet had spoken. "Do you mean, my man, that you know what became of this girl? If you know that, you can serve us to some advantage."

The fellow shrugged his shoulders, still swinging his dangling leg, and indulged in a smile of assurance.

"It's myself I'm looking to serve, boss, not you two easy marks," he coolly replied.

"Is that why you said nothing to the detectives you claim to have seen here?" demanded Matfield.

"Aye, that's why, mister."

"Yet they would have paid you for any reliable information concerning the missing girl."

"Mebbe so— yet mebbe not!" leered the boatman. "I had in mind two people as I knowed would give up a wad of bills to have me keep my mouth closed."

"Speak more plainly, sir! I've no patience with your insolence, nor your beating about the bush. What do you know about this girl's disappearance?"

"Know about it, eh?" echoed the fellow. "Only what my own peepers showed me last night."

"Go on!" from Abel Matfield.

"I saw, first of all, a little black craft at the landing out here— and that's what I've never seen before; leastwise, not in the dead of night. I thought, mebbe, some chaps was after cracking the deaf and dumb establishment here. So I made a landing to find out what was doing, hiding my wherry close to the bank and myself in here."

"And then?"

"I soon saw I was wrong. 'Twasn't long before I saw a woman that works here— her with black eves and hair— along with two men and a gal, that they were taking down to their craft. The two men put off across the river along with the gal a bit later, but the woman went back to the crib and—"

"Hold your horses!" interrupted Jonas, now grown gray as ashes. "Did you see the men plainly? Would you know them if—"

"Know 'em, eh!" cut in the boatman, with a derisive laugh. "D'ye think I'm daffy, or gone—"

"I think you're a lying, insolent scoundrel!" Abel Matfield's tone was violent, and indicated how much he was roused.

"You imply that we were the two men. Your assertions are libelous. You will be arrested, you rascal, and—"

"Oh, cut it out, you fool!" gasped the boatman, suddenly springing down from the bench to retreat from the uplifted cane of the enraged lawyer. "If that's the way you feel, I'll say no more. Ill give the yarn to that smooth guy, instead, and mebbe—"

"You'll do nothing of the kind," asserted Jonas, instantly grappling with the boatman when he appeared about to escape, and hurling him violently against the rustic wall near-by. "You'll stay right here. Keep your head, dad, for this

won't do!" he hurriedly added, wheeling sharply about to seize his father's uplifted arm. "We may be overheard. This dog must be silenced at once, but not with violence. You should see that for yourself. See here, you fellow, we'll do what's right by you. We've got the girl, I'll admit that, and—"

"And that's the one and only admission I've aimed to evoke!"

The interruption now came quick as a flash from the lips of the man who had been briefly shrinking with apparent alarm from the blind violence of one of his observers, while he listened with eyes aglow to the hurried, half-frenzied expostulations and confession of the other. He sprang up while he spoke, passing his hand swiftly over his head and across his face— a movement which, sweeping away a portion of his disguise, revealed the strong face of Mr. Felix Boyd.

Jonas Matfield swore; and from his father came a half-smothered roar of mingled astonishment and vengeful rage. Instantly, as if under the same impulse of utter desperation, both scoundrels sprang upon Boyd, and, despite his attempt to evade them, bore him heavily to the ground.

At the same moment something that at first might have appeared to be only a shadow, darted by the hanging vines of the rustic arbor and quickly dashed through the arched doorway; and in another moment two blows in quick succession, dealt by the brawny arm of the Central Office man, sent the Mat fields sprawling upon the ground at either side of the whilom boatman.

"Easy, Jimmie! That'll answer!" gasped Boyd, as he scrambled to his feet, quite pale for a second. "I wasn't dead sure you were so handy. Your irons for the son, Jimmie. I'll look after the old man."

"PLAIN to me, Jimmie?" queried Mr. Felix Boyd, with his eyes raised from the signed confession he had been reading.

"Well, yes, it was tolerably plain, old man, even before we wrung the whole truth from those two rascals yesterday and restored Miss Klein to her quarters with Doctor Vantoon. Before I had talked long with the latter, Jimmie, I began to suspect the true facts.

"It really was very simple, Jimmie; so very simple that an explanation seems hardly required. At the very outset I doubted that Miss Klein had voluntarily departed with Lovejoy, despite that I believed she might be deeply in love with him. Such a move on the part of a deaf and dumb girl, who very soon would arrive at an age when she might do as she pleased, seemed utterly improbable."

Jimmie Coleman nodded acquiescence.

"The circumstances stated by Doctor Vantoon, however, quickly suggested a much more plausible theory to me," continued Boyd. "Miss Klein is an

orphan, without relatives, but with a fortune held in trust by the Matfields for the past four years. It occurred to me, Jimmie, that they very possibly had misappropriated considerable of her money, that the impending settlement of her account would expose their crime, and that they had devised a scheme for removing the girl, either with a view to coerce her, or possibly to kill her, yet in so crafty a way as to avert their own incrimination."

"I see the point," nodded Coleman; "but it did not then occur to me."

"Yet several circumstances pointed to it, Jimmie. The girl could have departed as easily by daylight, if she had been so inclined, without going to the trouble of drugging Jane Randall and escaping from the house through the latter's chamber. The utter needlessness of that suggested several possibilities which appeared to confirm my theory— a possibility that Jane Randall was lying; that she had been bribed to aid Abel Matfield; that she had not been drugged at all; that this pretence was only a part of their scheme; that she had lured the girl out of the house upon some pretext that night; and that the two men then had taken Miss Klein away."

"Easily accomplished, too, since she regarded all of them as friends," observed Coleman.

"That was another point," nodded Boyd. "Bear in mind, too, that the girl will be twenty in about two months, that the time was ripe for this move, assuming the fraud mentioned; and that it was at Matfield's suggestion that she was quartered at Doctor Vantoon's place. All of these points, Jimmie, seemed to confirm my suspicion, and I then went in search of tangible evidence by which to verify it."

"And you evidently found it, Felix!"

"Indeed, I did!" exclaimed Boyd, laughing. "I discovered, first of all, faint signs of earth, or clay, on the base-board of the rear entry, such as might have been left by the edge of a woman's skirt, if the latter was thus soiled, when she passed through the entry. Naturally this must have been left when she entered, not when she left, the house; and recalling that it had stormed a few hours before Miss Klein's departure, also that those rear stairs were only rarely used, I concluded that two women must have gone out that wav, one of whom had returned with her skirts somewhat soiled. That could not have been Miss Klein, however, for it is improbable that she would have been allowed to return to the house after having been craftily lured out of it. So, Jimmie, it became plain enough that the Matfields had had a female confederate, than whom none was more likely than Jane Randall."

"Surely, Felix, surely."

"In the foot-path," continued Boyd, "T found impressions plainly left by Miss Klein's boots. A little later, Jimmie, I found that Jane Randall wore a boot

of the same size and style, also that the edge of one of the skirts in her closet was soiled with particles of clay, presumably taken up from the bespattered grass over which it had dragged, and over which you may have seen me pass my hand to learn whether it should be soiled in a corresponding way."

"Yes, yes, I recall that."

"In her chamber, Jimmie, I also found a pile of New York newspapers, all morning editions, and all open at the 'Personal' column. This gave me a clue, and after a very brief search I found in yesterday morning's paper a 'Personal' signed 'M,' and containing only the single line:

"To-night at one."

"Humph !" grunted Coleman. "Very significant."

"So significant, Jimmie, that I rightly inferred that a plot had previously been agreed upon by Abel Matfield and Jane Randall, that the press had been deemed less hazardous than the mails, and that the pile of papers indicated how faithfully the woman had watched for a 'Personal telling her on what night the plot was to be carried out."

"That's plain enough, Felix. Anything more?"

"A few minor points, Jimmie," laughed Felix Boyd. "In the foot-path I also discovered prints of men's boots; two sizes, indicating how many had been engaged in the girl's abduction. At the river-bank, moreover, I discovered signs that a black boat of some sort had recently been at the landing you saw there. These bits of evidence completed my case and showed me the way. I was convinced that the Matfields had abducted the girl; that they had mailed some candy to her in a wrapper postmarked Yonkers, and inscribed it with a hand resembling that of Lovejoy, a forgery probably made possible by securing one of his letters to the girl, easily done by the Randall woman; and that the latter, after the girl's abduction, had, in order to give color to the imposition, probably substituted some drugged candy for that which the box originally had contained."

"With a design to fix the abduction upon Lovejoy," growled Coleman grimly. "A rascally plot, certainly!"

"Having arrived at all of these conclusions, Jimmie, I reasoned that my only safe course would be to corner the Matfields without delay, and while they felt comparatively free from suspicion."

"I see the point, Felix."

"So I gave you a hint of my designs, Jimmie, under cover of giving you a line to the Yonkers chief of police," laughed Boyd. "That rid the place of you, my boy, and I then framed up an occasion for my own departure."

"And return, eh?" chuckled Coleman.

"Well, I meant to return all right," smiled Boyd. "With the help of Grady, the stableman, I perfected a disguise and secured a skiff to give color to the part I intended playing; and then I— ah, well, what need of more, Jimmie? You have seen how it turned out."

"Yes, rather!" Coleman grimly smiled. "It has landed the Matfields and Jane Randall behind the bars, all right, and driven them to a complete confession. Their whole scheme and their motives were about what you have stated, eh?"

"Yes, Jimmie, and what I suspected almost from the beginning. They have run through nearly half of Miss Klein's fortune, and now are booked to pay the penalty."

"Humph!" grunted the Central Office man. "There'll be in that but little consolation for the girl."

"She will have for consolation, Jimmie," said Boyd, "something far more dear to her than wealth— the love of a devoted husband, the house and home with which he will provide her, and possibly— God grant it!— the yearned-for acquirements promised her by Doctor Dudley Vantoon. In that case, Jimmie, her house no longer will be— a house of silence!"

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5: The Stigma

J. Winton Heming

1900-1953

The Australian Woman's Mirror, 4 Aug 1925

J Winton Heming

Heming was a compulsive writer of plays, short stories, novels and non-fiction, and managed to make a rather sparse living at it in depression era Australia. During WW2, imports of all non-essentials ceased, and that included magazines and books. Heming, like a number of other Australian writers, filled this yawning gap by churning out hundreds of Western, Romance, Science Fiction, Crime, and other genre stories under numerous pseudonyms. He claimed to have written more than 200 novels. This is an early story: he was 25 when it was published.

CARTEL'S farm was situated in the angle of a creek. Over it and its four other inhabitants Stephen Cartel ruled with a firm, unrelenting hand. The star of his four subjects was his daughter Mabel—an Australian country girl to her finger tips, highly colored, well built, pretty, and an expert housekeeper. The others were Cartel's laborers— Jim Carney, a tall youth of quiet demeanor; Arthur Field, noisy and boisterous; and Tom Grume, the best looking of the three— a reserved sort of young man who was willing to laugh with the others or be silent with them, but with something about him which inspired respect. The three men got on well together except in one particular— the boss's daughter.

But they never allowed old Stephen to see them throwing amorous glances in Mabel's direction. No! Stephen Cartel had very distinctive ideas about the young men of the time, his laborers in particular, and about his daughter's use to himself as a housekeeper. He had let it be known by hints dropped here and there that any love-making meant dismissal. So the three loved in silence.

One day when Tom Grume was working some distance from the homestead patching up a rabbit-proof fence, Mabel rode up to near where he worked.

“I’ve brought your lunch, Tom,” she told him.

“Thank you,” he said, wiping his moist brow. “It’s warm, isn’t it?”

“Yes.” The girl paused. Then she went on a trifle shyly, “I have brought enough lunch for two. Dad has gone to town with Jim, and there’s only Arthur at home. He gets on my nerves the way he stares at me, and he says such silly things; so I came out here.”

Tom grinned delightedly, and Mabel, dismounting, spread a cloth in a shady spot and laid out the lunch, while Tom lit a fire and boiled the billy. Then they sat down to eat.

“Arthur was talking about himself as usual,” Mabel remarked. “He’s always boasting. I don’t like to hear men talk about themselves, do you?” She prattled on without waiting for an answer. “Jim never talks about himself, but then he never talks at all. He’s stupid, I think. Now you talk about other things. Why don’t you talk about yourself?”

Tom looked away over the plains.

“I have nothing to talk about,” he said.

“But you must have,” Mabel persisted. “And I’d *like* to hear you.”

He smiled for an instant, and then looked at her seriously.

“Would you,” he asked; “why?”

“It seems as if you have seen things— big things, sad things. It seems that you have lived a different life to the others.”

“I suppose I have,” he said quietly.

She leant forward eagerly.

“Will you tell me?” she asked, laying her hand on his.

He looked down at her hand for a moment; then he brought it to his lips and kissed it. The next second he was gazing over the plains again.

“I think not,” he said.

“Why?”

“I gave my reason— just now.” He glanced momentarily at her hand.

She saw the glance, and looked down.

“Why did you do— *that*?” she asked confusedly.

"It was because—" He turned quickly to her. “Oh, Mabel, I love you! Can't you see?”

Her eyes were shining.

“Do you?” she said softly. "I'm glad."

There was silence for a little while.

“Is it because you love me," she asked, “that you won’t tell me of yourself?"

“Yes.”

“Don’t you think you should tell me? That’s only fair. I love you, too, and I will understand.”

He looked at her meditatively.

“You are wondering, I suppose, he said, “why I don’t kiss you; but I’m going to tell you something first, and then you can judge whether I should kiss you or not. I'm going to tell you why I never speak of my

“Go on,” she urged softly. “I will understand.”

“I had always been a vagabond sort of wanderer,” he began, “and five years I found myself in Surry Hills, Sydney, in the company of a man named Parker. We were pretty close friends, and I used to wonder how it was that he always possessed ample money and never worked. One day he told me that he was a safe-breaker, and asked me to break open a safe. Anyway, although I was fairly poor at the time, I refused, but out of curiosity I learnt from him the ‘art’ of the safe-blower. I wish I never had. Parker went to England one day. I was boarding with a woman named Haines. She had seven children and her husband had decamped. They were in miserable circumstances, and then— I lost my job! In the end I went to a place which Parker had pointed out to me, and bought the necessary tools, and that night I broke into a post-office and ‘blew’ the safe. I told the woman Haines that I had had a win at the races, and gave her £500. I think she thought I was an angel. Then I went to Melbourne.

“But I had bungled the ‘job’ somewhere— the police traced me, and I was given three years in Goulburn Gaol. I was released nine months early for good behavior. Those two and a quarter years when I was only a number— Number 83— were agony. But they came to an end at last, and I went to Sydney. There, in an employment agency, I got this job with your father, and—here I am.”

The girl leant forward and laid her hand on his.

“You have suffered,” she said softly, “and I love you.”

“What?” In his query mingled astonishment and pleasure. “It hasn’t made any difference?”

“Yes— it has!” she said. And then, as his face clouded: “It has made me love you more.”

He rose to his feet and, lifting her, he kissed her tenderly and reverently.

“My little girl,” he said.

Tom did not tell Cartel. He had wanted to, but Mabel was afraid.

Then Tom found an empty wallet, which he had never seen before, in the pocket of an old coat of his which was hanging in his room. He gazed at it perplexedly. Had it come there by accident? It looked suspiciously like a “plant,

and if that was so, then someone had discovered the stigma on his past, and was trying to brand him a thief and so disgrace him. He decided to throw it into one of the yards and keep his eyes open.

Next day Jim Carney complained that he had lost a wallet.

Cartel asked if it was valuable.

“No, I wouldn’t say that,” replied Jim. “But there’s a pound-note in it.”

Cartel elevated his eyebrows, and Tom inwardly flinched. There had been nothing in the wallet when he had found it. He was glad now that he had thrown it away instead of searching for an owner.

“We’ll all have a look for it," Cartel said. “A pound’s a pound and I don’t want to think there’s a thief here.”

Tom did not trust himself to speak. He felt that one of the men at the table was trying to play a despicable trick upon him, and watched them carefully. But he failed to get a clue.

Arthur Field found the wallet next morning in the yard where Tom had thrown it, but the incident created a strained feeling among the five persons on the farm.

That afternoon Tom told Mabel what he knew of the wallet. She was surprised, and endorsed the plan of keeping his part in the affair quiet,

“Dad told me last night,” she said, “that he had an idea who stole the pound, and he rather hinted it was you. I told him I was sure it wasn’t you, and he snapped at me ‘Why?’ and I didn’t know what to say.”

“Someone is trying to ‘pool’ me,” Tom remarked.

“Yes. I think it’s Jim. I don’t believe he ever put a pound in the wallet.”

Tom, in accordance with his decision, searched his room every night in case of more treachery; and three nights later he found, pushed far under his bolster, a watch and chain. They were Arthur Field’s. Perplexed, Tom decided to hide them and ask Mabel’s advice. He climbed through the window and buried them in the soft earth outside. Later he told Mabel, and she returned the watch to Field’s room; but the tension on the farm grew more acute. Then, three weeks later, on the day when the fortnightly payment of the men’s wages was due— the climax came.

Cartel, red with rage, stamped out of the house to where the men were having their morning wash.

“Come on,” he roared, “who’s the burglar here?”

The men looked at him, obviously amazed.

“I want to know who’s the burglar, bellowed Cartel. “Who broke open the dining-room cupboard last night, and stole the cash-box with the wages in? Come in here all of you.”

He strode back into the house, the three men following slowly, while they wiped soap and water from their faces.

“Mabel!” Cartel called. “Come in here."

Mabel entered from the kitchen.

“Stand there, girl,” Cartel shouted. "I'm going to thrash this matter out. I want that money! I’ll find that thief or die. In any case I'll send for the police before the hour’s out.”

“I hope you don’t think—” began Carney.

“Shut up! Never mind what I think," Cartel roared. “This is how the case stands. First Jim is robbed, then Arthur, now me. There is only one man who has not yet been robbed!”

He paused, and the others turned towards Tom. Tom kept his eyes on Cartel. He was thinking hard...

“And,” shouted the farmer, emphasising each word with a thump on the table as he rose to his feet, “that man has a criminial record. He is an ex-convict—he got three years for safe-breaking!”

He pointed an accusing finger at Tom. Then he turned to Mabel.

“You knew that, didn’t you?” he sneered.

Mabel answered him clearly:

“Yes, I did! And I know more. I know that Tom is innocent, and I know who the real despicable thief is!”

“Who is it?” Cartel demanded.

“You!” cried Mabel. “My own father!"

There were tears in her eyes as she half staggered towards Tom,

“I had a suspicion it was you,” she went on, “and when, from my room, I heard you get up very late last night, I followed you, and saw you break open the cupboard and take the box to your bedroom.”

Her father dropped back into his chair, his face ashen-grey. He was spluttering his words;

“It was— all for you, daughter. I saw that he loved you— and you loved him. One day I heard about him being a gaol-bird—”

He was a pitiable object hunched up in his chair, sobbing and bereft of his bluster. But his daughter’s face expressed only contempt.

“Fathers renounce their sons and daughters,” she said, “but *I* am going to renounce my father. You have been selfish and cruel.”

With Tom’s arm supporting her, she went out through the open door.

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6: The Haunted House

J. W. Heming

1900-1953

Monster Comic No 4, undated, probably 1945

Second tale of Dick Lane, "The Wanderer". Monster Comic was a tabloid-sized mixture of pulp fiction, comic strips, humour, competitions and puzzles, in monochrome. No 4 may be the only surviving issue. This tale was written 20 years after the previous Heming story.

DICK LANE sat in Machattie Park, Bathurst, and stared thoughtfully and unseeingly at some ducks swimming in an ornamental pond. The park was a quiet oasis about which surged the life of the large town.

Dick was eighteen years old, handsome, husky, and with a purpose in life. He went over in his mind the events of the last few days— how the firm where he had worked had been robbed of a large sum of money, and, his father having vanished, the blame had naturally fallen upon Mr. Lane. But Dick had discovered and caught the real criminals. In doing so he had learned that they had brutally hit his father on the head and put him on a goods-train to the west; at Bathurst he had been discovered and put supposedly drunk, but plainly suffering the effects of the blow. The blow had also, it would seem, robbed him of his memory.

Dick had come to Bathurst, where the police were searching for his father without success, except some faint clues. A couple of people had been discovered who had said they had seen a man of Lane's description staggering along the road towards Blayney. Dick, who was not short of money, had immediately hired a car and followed this clue, but all his enquiries drew a blank. So Dick had returned to Bathurst and now sat in the park in the centre of the town thinking the matter out and wondering what he had best do to find his father.

His enquiries that day had seemed to suggest that Lane had indeed taken the Western road, for he had been seen the previous night near Orton Park. Some people there, noticing him staggering along, had spoken to him, discovered he was not drunk, as they had at first supposed, and had taken him inside with the good-heartedness so universal with Australian country people. There they had fed him. He had complained of headaches and had offered no information about himself, and they had not pressed their kindly questions, thinking he did not wish tc talk about himself. All they knew was that he had a

bad head and seemed to be wandering in his mind. He was quite rational and sane, except when he tried to remember his past. He had left at last and had wandered on towards Perthville.

Dick was very worried. No further news of his father could he gain. Where had John Lane slept last night; where was he now? Was he lying ill somewhere? Dick had told the Bathurst police of his discoveries and they had promised to warn stations large and small to keep a look-out for John Lane. But in the meantime Dick could not sit still waiting— neither could he afford to hire a car for an extensive tour of the countryside. Another point against that was the fact that the car could not go to places a lone man could go.

Dick decided he would search, nevertheless, and he would do it on his trusty bicycle. Therefore, he left the park and went across to the nearby Post Office and sent a wire to a friend in Sydney (with whom he had left the key of the flat occupied by his father and himself) with a request to send the bicycle by the first available train. It should arrive next day, if his friend moved fast enough. Dick decided to start walking and let the police send the bicycle on to Perthville the next day. He could pick it up there.

He went down William Street to the police station, told them what he was going to do and what he wanted them to do, bought several things in the various shops to make up his swag, purchased some food, and started off.

It was by then fairly late in the afternoon and he switched his swag into a comfortable position and set off along the road, the railway for company on his left, at a steady, swinging walk, which he kept within bounds, in spite of his impatience, in the hope that his pace would last.

Following directions from the police, he turned at Rockett Street and, after half a mile's walking, crossed the railway by the overhead bridge. He stood on the bridge for a moment, looking up the line and wondering where, in that great immensity of country, his father may be and what adventures might lie in wait for himself. He turned and looked in the other direction, towards Sydney, and wondered when he would see the city again. But wondering would not find his father, so he trudged on, glancing occasionally at the sky, which was overcast and promised rain. The railway was now on his right hand, though it had a more or less level path to cover while he went up and down little hills on the road, it was three miles to Orton Park and by the time he reached there darkness had almost fallen and the rain had already commenced to fall.

He went into the main store, made some enquiries about his father, which told him no more than he already knew, and then asked where he might find a place to sleep.

The man behind the counter looked at him with a thoughtful grin.

"There are several places," he said. "You could sleep out in the open, but the rain wouldn't make that very comfortable. I have some barns at the back where you might be able to doss. Then you might get a room at the pub. And again, you might prefer the haunted house."

Dick pricked up his ears.

"Haunted House?" he queried,

The storekeeper's grin widened,

"So they say," he remarked. "I don't believe in ghosts myself, but it seems a lot of people do believe in 'em— and all those people live round here. The ghosts don't live round here they could hardly 'live' anywhere. The haunted house is a large two-storey place about a mile up the cross-road; it stands in its own grounds and is pretty dilapidated, but it has a good roof on it. The swaggies used to use it, but one night one of 'em saw something— goodness knows what!— and came tearing into town here in a blue funk. He was the first. There have been a couple of swaggies. Then there were two boys who thought they could frighten the ghost and got frightened themselves. Now no one goes near the place. All imagination, I reckon."

"Have you been out there?" asked Dick.

The storekeeper shook his head, with a dry smile. "Too busy," he said. "Besides, I have a very vivid imagination, too."

Dick laughed. "It sounds interesting." he said. "I have always wanted to meet a ghost, though I don't believe I ever shall. What did the frightened ones see?"

"Nothing much. One couldn't keep his fire alight. It seemed that someone kept putting it out and scattering the ashes out the back door. He had a feeling there was someone else in the kitchen, and it got on his nerves at last. Others heard whispers, and one saw a shadowy sort of man, but when he spoke to it it faded away. I guess that was the shadow of a tree— they play funny tricks at times."

"Has the place a history?"

"So they say. It was owned by a man once who lived there all alone. That was before I came here; about twenty years ago, I believe. It was a fairly big place for one man and whether he had it built or bought it ready built I don't know. In those days Orton Park was a very small village. He came from the city, so the story goes, and he must have gone back there, for one day callers to the house found it locked up. He has never been back since and he left his furniture and all. Of course, small boys have broken the windows and I suspect there has been some looting. Funny thing, but it might have a quite rational explanation. He might have taken a trip somewhere and been killed in an

accident. His name, if I remember correctly, was Tom Clare. Anyhow, there the place stands— a ruin almost. He might be living somewhere else and be a casual sort of customer who just doesn't worry about the joint. He might have been scared away by the ghost, too. Lights are often seen in there by people with good imaginations. Would vou care to sleep there?"

Dick's eyes were bright. "I think I will," he said. "It sounds interesting. How do I find it?"

HE MADE a few purchases and an hour later found him walking up the path towards the house. The front gate was broken and the way to the front door was overgrown with weeds and grass, but his strong electric torch picked out the path for him. The rain had settled down to a steady drizzle.

He paused to flash his torch over the house, with a pleasant thrill of anticipation. Although he did not believe in ghosts he was not entirely sure there were no such things. He told himself that there were more things in heaven and earth than man know of. There *may* be ghosts.

He made a circuit of the place. So far as he could see in the light from his torch, it had been a rather nice house. It had two storeys, and vines had crept over parts of the walls. At the back where two solidly-built sheds, both locked. Evidently the locals or swaggies had not thought them worth investigating. They would be a harness shed and a barn of some sort. The back door of the house had been broken from its hinges, and presumably used for firewood.

Dick switched off the torch as he stepped on to the back verandah. The darkness leapt at him with an eerie thrill. He hastily lit the torch again and stepped through the back doorway. He found himself in a kitchen. It had been shamefully used in the past twenty years; the furniture was broken, the walls stained, the floor scattered with rubbish. The open fireplace held the remnants of a fire, out these many years.

Dick set down his torch, gathered up some of the leaves which had blown through the open door and with them and the remnants of a kitchen chair, started a fire going. As its friendly flames leapt up he felt a little better, for he could not deny to himself that the place gave him an eerie sensation. He got some water from the overflowing tank just outside, and put on his billy to boil. While the water was boiling he decided to give the house a quick once-over. He took his torch and did so. There was nothing unusual about the place. It was much the same as any other two-storied residence, except that time and weather and lack of care had badly affected it and given it an air of desolation.

Houses have personalities of their own and the house of friendly people always has a warm, welcoming, friendly feeling about it. The atmosphere of this place was forlorn and deadly. For no reason at all it made Dick shudder.

After all, it was just an empty house, with the rain dripping from the eaves and running away with little gurgles in the broken down-pipes, the wind brushing the vines against the wooden walls and seeming to whisper indistinguishable warnings.

Dick returned to the kitchen and the warmth and light of the fire. He tried to throw off the feeling of loneliness and sadness. There was also a suggestion that the house disapproved of him and wanted him to go away, as though he was not welcome. He made himself busy at the fire preparing his meal, hoping to get rid of that weird sensation. For a while this served his purpose, but when he had eaten and had his tea and was sitting quiet again, the feeling returned.

He had put out his torch and kept the fire bright with fresh wood and leaves. It crackled and hissed, but did not make sufficient noise to drown out the other sounds the creak of boards, the whispering of the vines, the stroking fingers of the rain, the tapping of tree-boughs on the walls, the squelch of a soft footstep outside. A footstep? Was it a footstep? Dick listened again. No, it must be his imagination.

The fire threw weird dancing shadows on the walls and momentarily threw into relief the dark, broken windows like eye sockets in a skull; the black rectangles of the doors— one to the verandah, one leading into the rest of the house. Dick heard it again. It *was* a footstep!

He turned towards the outer door. Someone walked across the verandah and in a moment the figure of a man showed in the doorway.

He was a young man, dressed in a dark suit and hat, but there was nothing ghostly about him; he was just an ordinary Australian. Dick, who had not known what to expect, breathed a sigh of relief.

"Good evening," said the man, and stepped into the kitchen.

"Good evening," said Dick.

The man went to the fire and crouched over it, warming his hands. He did not appear to be very wet, so could not have come far. Dick inspected him. He had rather a handsome face as the firelight threw it into view, but there was no expression in his dark eyes at the moment.

"Cold," said the stranger.

"Quite cool," agreed Dick. "Care for some tea? There's some there.

I'll put it on to warm."

"No, thanks," said the man.

"You live round here?" Dick asked.

"Yes. I saw lights flashing in the old place and I thought I would stroll over. I fancied it might be a ghost. They say this place is haunted."

Dick chuckled. "I thought you were a ghost when I heard your footsteps," he said. "You gave me quite a start."

The stranger gave a slight smile. "Are you afraid of ghosts?" he asked.

"I don't know," Dick laughed. "I've never met one. Are you?"

The man shook his head. "There is no need to be afraid of ghosts," he said, "Why should a ghost hurt you? It is the living we have to be afraid of; it is the living who are evil."

He said it so forlornly that Dick looked at him, wondering if he had an enemy. The man seemed to divine his thoughts.

"Not only the evil in other people's minds," he said, "but the worse evil in our own; evil which can destroy us. Sometimes we let our imaginations run away with us and become a danger to ourselves. There are so many things within us— envy, jealousy, hatred, fear, greed, intolerance— those sort of things. Those we must guard against more than outside enemies."

Dick was mildly surprised. He had not been long enough "on the wallaby" to know that the open road is the place to meet philosophers, for the blue sky and the trees and the great spaces set a man to thinking. The stranger shivered and rubbed his hands before the flames. Dick threw on some more wood.

After a short, thoughtful pause the man went on "Yes, it is the evil within ourselves. I could tell you a story about that. It can shadow a man's life— and his death, too, if it comes to that. The lack of a moment's thought... This place reminds me of that story; you know its history, I suppose?"

"I have a rough idea of it."

"I've been round here for a number of years— I know all about it. Nice fellow he must have been— but queer. Or was he queer? He might have been no more than natural. Tom Clare was his name— a young fellow. Seemed an ordinary sort of cove. And yet he just vanished. People have often wondered about that. It was quite a mystery in its way. I wonder if it will ever be cleared up. Anyhow, about this yarn I was going to tell you— if you feel like hearing it."

"Certainly," said Dick. "I'm not much of a talker myself, but I like to listen. Besides, I value your company. It is rather lonely here alone— with only one's imagination to run riot."

The man nodded. "Imagination is a bad thing sometimes," he agreed. "Fear is only imagination— a terrible imagination. This man I was going to tell you about was like Clare; just a young and ordinary fellow. But this cove had an enemy within him— his imagination and a gnawing fear which grew out of it. It nearly drove him mad. You have no idea how such a thing can torture a man."

Dick had no idea, but he nodded and wondered if the stranger was telling his own story as he stared at the fire.

"Well, this fellow lived In the city. He had some money, but he was an inveterate gambler—until one fateful day. He was gambling with some friends and he suspected that one was cheating. He accused the man— we will call

him Jones— and as the other players were honest, that started a general argument and, later, a general brawl. Jones went down from a blow from this man's fist— and did not rise again. The card party split up. In the papers the man read that Jones was dead, and that he was wanted. He realised then what a rabbit must feel like with the ferrets after it. He fled to the country, wanted for manslaughter. He stopped his running at last and settled down in a small town. He had plenty of money as he had been having a run of luck. All the time he was watching for one face and one pair of keen eyes. Those belonged to the detective who had been assigned to his case— we'll call him Brown. Brown and the gambler had been friends in the past, and that was the irony of it that Brown should be sent after his friend. It was done, of course, because Brown knew the gambler and could identify him swiftly. But the gambler seemed safe in this small town and, to make himself doubly safe, he had a house built near the town and here he lived a very lonely life— mixing with nobody and with only his imagination and gnawing fear for company."

The stranger was silent for several seconds, warming his hands and staring morosely into the fire.

At last he went on: "As time passed and it looked as though the police had given up the chase, his fears gradually subsided, and he began to take more interest in his life. His money was running out, and he was hiring himself out to farmers in the vicinity and doing a little farming on his own land. But he was always one to act without thinking first— and that was his undoing in the end. One day he had been out shooting rabbits on foot and it was dark when he got back to his house. He walked quietly round the back of the place and paused suddenly. There was a light in the kitchen. He wondered who it could be. He had no friends. He clutched his repeating rifle closer and crept on to the verandah."

The man fell silent again. Dick looked at him narrowly. The stranger's eyes were closed and there was an expression of horror and pain upon his face; unbearable pain. He seemed to be gasping for breath. Presently he was speaking again:

"What did he see? Two big men sitting smoking in his kitchen— and one of them was the detective, Brown! The man stood there for only a second at the window while his world seemed to be crashing down around him. He did not think. He was gripped by his fear of gaol. He raised his rifle and shot the two men again and again through the window. The red of their blood seemed to melt into a crimson haze which reached his brain, so that he lost consciousness.

"When he awoke it was almost morning, and he was lying on the back verandah. He pulled himself together and went into the kitchen. The two men lay where they had fallen— stone dead.

"He stared at them for several minutes in a hazy fashion and he remembered that Brown would leave a widow and three children. Still in a daze he went to his toolshed and got a pick and shovel and dug two graves. The sun was high when he had buried Brown's companion, and was putting Brown into his last resting place. He had a crazy notion then to see the warrant for his arrest, and he took Brown's papers from the detective's pocket and jammed them into his own. He finished the burying and in his madness set up two crosses over the graves saying the men had died in the execution of their duty. He went back to the kitchen and sat down, staring morosely at the blood-stained floor. At last he cleaned up the kitchen. He did not feel like food. He sat down and took out Brown's papers."

The man fell silent again, and Dick glanced at him with shivers running up and down his spine, and the hair raising on his neck. Was this a true story? Was this man a murderer; a madman with whom he was alone out there in the bush? Dick was no fool with his fists, but this man was solidly built and looked as though he could be very dangerous. And if he was mad—

The man was talking again: "He did not find a warrant. No! No, he found a letter from Brown's superiors telling him that a man injured in an accident and dying— a man who had been one of the other gamblers— had confessed that he was responsible for Jones' death. The reader of the letter had knocked Jones down and had then fled, but Jones was simply unconscious, and in his rage this other man had struck Jones over the head with a bottle— and that had killed Jones. The letter told Brown to find out the man who had been blamed, and to tell him that he had no need to fear any more— that he was free to come and go as he wished. And Brown, because of his old friendship, had set out on the task with a light heart on this happy mission— which had led to his own death. Evidently he had known where to find his friend all the time, for his instructions were only a day old, so he must have gone straight to the innocent gambler's house— but he had presumably previously kept his knowledge secret because of their friendship. And for his kindness the gambler had killed him!"

"Then it was all a ghastly mistake!" Dick gasped.

The man nodded soberly. "All a ghastly mistake," he echoed. "Yet there was no one to blame for that mistake but the gambler. It was all caused by his imagination and his fear, and his never stopping to think and investigate first. Imagine his feelings when he discovered that he had been wrong— that he had

ruined his chance of freedom and killed his friend! For hours he tramped through the house like a madman. It was a terrible time!"

Dick glanced at him sharply. That last sentence sounded as though the man talking of himself.

"What— er— happened to the gambler?" Dick asked presently.

"He hanged himself," said the man.

"It was all he could do. He could not live with that remorse. He hanged himself in the tool-shed where he had buried them. And to this day his bones are still above the earth because no one knows."

"You mean no one ever found his body or the graves?"

The man shook his head and turned his expressionless eyes upon Dick.

"No," he said slowly. "You see, he locked the shed on the inside and he was such a quiet fellow ind resented friendliness that he was not missed for a long time; and then people thought he had gone away and would come back as the place was all locked up. That was a great many years ago, and the shed has never been opened. It has no window, so no one could see the terrible secret inside. Well, I must be getting along. Thanks for the spot of fire. I was cold; I am always cold."

The man rose from his haunches and walked to the door. He stopped there to look back at Dick.

"The shed is still locked," he said, with a strange meaning in his voice.

"Just a moment," said Dick, "Is this a true story?"

"Of course. The search for the police officers was in all the papers twenty years ago, but evidently Brown had not told anyone where he and his companion were going."

"Then if the hanging man and the graves were never found, how do you know all this?"

The man looked at him with his expressionless eyes. "I was Tom Clare" he said.

Then he was gone. Dick stared after him. He had not seen him go and he had not heard his footsteps on the verandah. Clare? Dick shuddered suddenly. That was the name of the man who had owned this house. A terrible realisation came to Dick. He sprang up and pulled his torch from his pocket. Hardly knowing what he was doing in his haste he ran from the house, the torch beam dancing before him. He hurried towards the nearest shed and again tried the door. It was firmly locked, but Dick was young and strong. He lifted up his foot and sent it crashing with all his power at the lock. The socket flew off inside and the door swung open. Dick flashed his torch over the interior. On the ground before him were two long mounds with little wooden

crosses, upon one of tnem was a leaped pile of human bones. Into one corner had rolled a grinning skull, eaten clean by ants, which gleamed whitely in the torch-light.

Above the bones a noose— very small— hung from a rafter!

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7: The Harbor of Refuge

Vernon Ralston

fl 1907-1920

Gippsland Farmers' Journal (Vic.) 19 Aug 1921

Also in several other Australian country newspapers published by the same goup.

I can find next to nothing about the author. He sold many stories to London's "The Weekly Tale Teller", which appeared between 1909 and 1916, and some to "Yes or No" (a weekly magazine) and "Cassell's". A passing reference in "Bairnsdale Advertiser and Tambo and Omeo Chronicle" (Vic. : 1882 - 1946) Fri 24 Jan 1913 identifies him as an Australian author. There is a biographical sketch of Ralston in The Weekly Tale-Teller, *4 March 1916, but I can't obtain it.*

THE Cosmopolitan Bar is one of the most interesting places in the West End. There you can see a unique mixture of the people who have got rich quickly, and the people who are bent on getting rich quickly; of mfen who have done the Government, and men who have done time. It is possible that you may lose your watch or notecase at the Cosmopolitan, but at any rate you will have the privilege of doing so in interesting society.

Often on Saturday evening I went to the Cosmopolitan with my friend, Connor, who was a light of the junior Bar. He said that it gave him a splendid opportunity of viewing his clients. Generally we would see someone he had prosecuted or some he had defended. Once or twice an exceedingly wealthy-looking gentleman, catching sight of Connor, departed hurriedly, but generally Connor passed unnoticed. As he remarked, nine-tenths of his clients had only seen him with a barrister's wig on and would never recognise him outside the courts.

One Saturday evening we sat there watching the crowd. "That's Wildlake," whispered Connor to me, "the famous hotel thief. Had to defend him once. He put up a splendid alibi. Never saw better coached witnesses. Prosecuting counsel couldn't break them down. Of course, the jury knew nothing of the man and found him not guilty. Only old Judge Garstin said 'You're a very fortunate man. Don't let me see you here again.' The man he's talking to is 'Lively Jack.' Don't know his other name. He makes a specialty of the three card trick in race trains."

"What do you make of the Yankee swanking at the bar?"

"Don't know any American criminals," said Connor, raising his eye-glass to survey the man I indicated. "Hear him bragging about how they won the war. If there are any ex-service men here there'll be a row. He's getting very drunk, isn't he? He's had four whiskies already since I've been in, and he's ordering another."

Connor watched him closely for a few minutes. "Interesting man," he said. "Won-der what his game is!"

"Why?" I asked.

"Well, he's pretending to be drunk and he isn't drunk. He's swanking about drinking, and all the time he's quietly spilling his whisky. And he's pretending to be a Yankee but he isn't a Yankee."

"He's got an accent you could cut with a knife."

"Too much accent. I don't say such an accent isn't possible, but an American who spoke like that would never dress in such good taste as this man. Besides, an American drinks his whisky first and the water afterwards. This man quite naturally reaches for the water jug directly he gets his whisky and pours some in. Then, did you notice when those two men in the far corner mentioned something about the Lancashire-Surrey match at the Oval to-day your Yankee stopped swanking for the first time to listen? Imagine— a Yankee interested in a British cricket match. It's quite impossible. I wonder what is the man's game. If he's hoping to make much out of the crowd he's talking to he is the most sanguine man I ever met. In that group there are two racecourse thieves and a gentleman who has done time for -blackmail. Just listen to him talking now."

"If he were really drunk he would not have much left by the end of the evening. That lot would see to it. But what's his game?"

The Yankee turned to the barmaid and ordered another whisky.

"You've had enough, sir," said the girl politely. "I really can't serve you with any more."

The blackguard took up his empty glass and shied it right in the girl's face.

She screamed with pain, and I saw the blood start to flow. The crowd in the bar might not be paragons, but you fairly heard their teeth grit when they saw this brutal assault on an unoffending girl. Half a dozen men rushed forward to grip him.

The Yankee wrenched himself free from the first man, slipped behind a table, produced a revolver, and fired a couple of shots. The crowd surged back.

"Keep down in your seat," said Connor to me. "Men always fire high." There was a move to the other side of the bar, a shout for the police, and the next moment two burly policemen entered.

The Yankee raised his revolver and fired. I heard a sound of falling glass as the bullet penetrated the swing door. The next moment Connor had thrown his glass of whiskey right into the Yankee's face. As he staggered back from this unexpected attack the police rushed him, knocked his revolver from his handand handcuffed him.

"Jolly prompt of you," I said to Connor, "and very plucky of the police."

"Yes, for all they knew they were risking theif lives, but I was watching that man. You can see the marks of his first two shots on the ceiling and wainscoting. That third shot when he'd the two policemen to aim at, and a blind man could have hit them, went right at the top of that swing door. He was deliberately firing high. Now why should he fire if it wasn't to hit? He could scarcely hope to frighten them off. A nasty, blackguardly business throwing that glass in the girl's face, wasn't it?"

We saw the Yankee hauled off to the police station, and Connor sat thinking the matter over.

"It beats me," he said, as we rose to leave, the bar. "Not drunk, yet pretending to be drunk; not a Yankee, yet pretending to be a Yankee; not a desperado, yet pretending to be one. Come along, we'll stroll round to Vil lars-street Police Station and have a chat with the inspector."

Connor's card brought the inspector out at once.

"Anything I can do for you, Mr.-Connor," he asked. "Hope you'll let me down easily next time you get me in the witness box."

"I say, inspector, we should like to know something about a prisoner just brought in. We saw the case in the Cosmopolitan Bar. No, you need not call us as witnesses. The bar staff and the police will be sufficient. But I was interested in the man. What do you make of him? What's his name and where does he come from?"

"He's an American," said the inspector. "J. Knowles Trenton, of Royal City, Omaha. Had his visiting cards on him."

"Any letters?"

"Yes, Just one from some pal in Royal City."

"Was it in an envelope?"

"No, just loose in his pocket book."

"Had he any money?"

"Five hundred dollars in American notes and a few pounds in English money."

"What is his address?"

"Well, he's a bit screwed and it's difficult to make his story out, but as far as I can tell he's no address. He came across from Paris to-day, left his bag at a station, and was looking, round for an hotel whin he got drunk and got into this trouble. He'll get it pretty stiff for throwing that glass at the girl. The stipendiary is always down on drunken assaults on women. Besides, be used a pistol. Lucky for him he was too drunk to hit anybody."

"Won't get off with a fine, then?"

"No he won't. Two months in the second division, I should think. It would, have been six months only the Stipendiary'll make allowances because lie's an American."

"Could we have a look at him, inspector?"

"Well, there's no harm ih letting you look at him through the peep-hole of the cell."

We looked in and saw the prisoner stretched on the wooden pallet, fast asleep.

"Pretty cool customer," said Connor. "A stranger in a strange land, gaoled on a serious charge, and sleeping like a child."

"Just drunk," said the inspector. "He was pretty full when he was brought in. I hope you haven't any idea of bailing him, Mr. Connor. Couldn't allow it in this case till he has been before the magistrate and that won't be till Tuesday, I expect. We've a lot of cases already for Monday and one or two of them quite long ones."

"No, no, I shouldn't bail him. Judging from the look of the sleeping innocent he's quite happy and doesn't want to oe bailed."

"A very funny case," said Connor, as we went away. "Suppose we go down on Tuesday morning and see the last of it."

"I'd like to see him get twelve months' hard labor," I said.

On Tuesday morning, Connor called for me and we went to the court. As we were driving there Connor suddenly threw down the paper he was reading.

"I think I see this man's game," he said. "He's really a deep customer. No, I'll tell you nothing till I've seen him in court."

The trial of the case did not take long. The prisoner made no attempt at defence. He said in sulky tones that the girl had insulted him and deserved all she got. I saw the Stipendiary's lips purse up as he made this remark, and judged that if the American had a faint chance of getting off with a fine he had lost it.

"Two months in the second division," said the Stipendiary severely directly the case was finished. "Had you been an Englishman I should have made the sentence much heavier. You are a discredit to your great country, sir."

Connor beckoned the police inspector over to him.

"I told you he'd get that," whispered the inspector. "Very just man, his worship."

"Look here, inspector," said Connor, "suppose a very clever man was wanted by the police, where would he hide?"

"Can't say, sir," said the inspector, puzzled by the question.

"Wouldn't a really clever man decide that there could be no safer place than a prison? If he could only get there until the hue and cry were over wouldn't his chance of escape be trebled? You know yourself that after a month the police begin to forget criminals. The hunt dies down. New crimes occupy them. They might keep their eyes open for notorious murderers, but ordinary criminals would be forgotten."

"That's true, sir. Unless it's a very famous case with a lot of publicity— I say that unless a man is caught under a month the chances are that he'll never be caught at all. Of course, that is, providing he's the sense to keep right way from his old Surroundings and associates."

"Two months would give him a good start," said Connor.

The inspector glanced up quickly. "But this American isn't wanted," he said.

"Haven't you had a notice about the missing manager of the Carlesford branch of the National Banking Company?" asked Connor.

"Yes, but we only got it this morning."

"Just so. I have just read about it in the papers. He was missing on Monday morning with seven thousand pounds in Treasury notes. It stands to reason lie bolted on Saturday. Why shouldn't he have come to London and got himself gaoled for safety? This prisoner answers the description of the missing man quite well, except that he has not a heavy moustache, and the first thing he would do would be to shave off his moustache."

"Yes, but this man had visiting cards and, letters."

"You can get visiting cards anywhere at two shillings for fifty. As for letters there was only one letter. Could not a man write a letter to himself apparently from a friend in Omaha? There was no envelope.. Too difficult to forge postmarks and get the stamps! You will look after his property for him carefully while he's in gaol. His money and papers will be kept under lock and key. You said he left a bag at some etation."

"Yes, Victoria."

"You haven't looked at it?"

"No, he wasn't wanted for theft, and there was no question about his identity."

"You have the ticket for his left luggage. Why not go and see it?"

The inspector looked dubious.

"Let me tell you," said Connor, "I watched this case from the start. That man played his cards to get to gaol. Everything was calculated and deliberate. When he went down the steps from the dock just now I saw him smile as he turned the corner. He had got just what he wanted."

"I'll get that ticket and go to Victoria at once," said the inspector.

Half an hour later we stood at the left-luggage office at Victoria Station. A large brown portmanteau was handed to the Inspector.

"We'll take it into the waiting-room and look at it," said the inspector. "I've brought his keys."

He fumbled with them for a minute or two.

"Not one that will fit," he said. "Well, I'll take the risk and break the lock. It'll soon prove if you are right." He wrenched the lock violently till it gave, and then opened the portmanteau.

He uttered an exclamation of amazement. One compartment of the portmanteau was entirely filled with neat bundles of pound notes.

"It's the man right enough," he said. "I'm awfully obliged to you, Mr. Connor. He'll get another five years now. And the bank are offering five hundred pounds to the person recovering the notes for them. You've got a claim to that."

"Well, put it forward, inspector. And when you get it for me give half to that poor girl whose face the blackguard disfigured, and a hundred each to both those plucky policemen, and keep fifty yourself for your trouble. And when you charge this man, inspector, just tell him from me that it was his cruel blackguardism in hurting that girl which made me interest myself in his case. If he'd half-killed a barman I don't think I should have bothered."

8: The Revenge of the Dead

Vernon Ralston

Camperdown Chronicle (Vic) 14 April 1908

THE TWO remittance men made a fine contrast as they stood in the bar at Carristown— Alger big, burly and brutal-looking, and Menzies with his slim figure and sly, foxy face. Amongst the mob of shearers and stock-riders their clothes of London cut, their white hands, and untanned faces marked them as men apart They had soon sought each other out In half a minute Alger had stood Menzies a drink. In half an hour they were as thick as —remittance men.

It was not long before Alger asked his new acquaintance:

"What are you doing here, old man?"

"Looking about for a station," replied Menzies promptly, who always had a lie ready.

"Rot!" said Alger, who grew comparatively straightforward when the drink was in him. "What did your people send you here for? Mine got sick of me because of a confounded cheque. Who'd have thought that a fellow's own father would have given him away for a miserable hundred or so. Here lam with two pounds a week allowed to me, and even that's stopped if I go down to Sydney. Won't have me in any port for fear I should slip home and turn up like the blooming prodigal. But what did you do?"

"Financial troubles brought me here," said Menzies, with a quiet smile.

Alger slammed him on the back with his great fist.

"I'll lay it wasn't for a matter of a hundred, or so that you went under. What do they allow you while you keep up here?"

Menzies shrugged his shoulders. "A hundred and fifty a year, paid weekly, conditionally on my not communicating with my family in any way. Rather an amusing allowance, isn't it? I should think I've spent as much as that in button-holes when I was in London."

"Man," cried Alger, "I've lost more than that at poker in the race-train coming from Ascot If I'd got my old governor out here who makes me starve in this hole, I'd have more than half a mind to throttle him. Think of the way they pay me— two pounds every blessed week. Now, if I had it In a lump I could enjoy life for a week if I starved all the rest of the year."

A prim-looking gentleman stepped up to the bar, nodded quietly to Alger. ordered a whisky, drank it quickly, and as speedily left the bar.

"Who is your highly-respectable friend?" sneered Menzies.

"That— why, he's no friend of mine. He's Burke, the bank manager, who pays me my money every Monday. A miserable old creature, he is. Won't give

a fellow an advance if you go on your knees to him. It'd make no earthly difference to him— it isn't his money. But all he says is, 'Business is business— I must carry out my instructions, Mr. Alger.' The brute! He lives alone at his blessed office with a lot of beastly pets and things. Never speaks to anyone except on business. Drops in here for his one drink every evening, and spends the rest of his time rooting after ferns and insects."

"Lives alone at the bank," said Menzies thoughtfully. "Wonder he isn't afraid of being held up!"

"Pooh! He isn't afraid. They say that twenty years ago, when he was in another up-country branch, some fellows tried to rush him. He shot two dead and lamed the third. The bank people would have promoted him twenty times over, but he only wants a place where he can collect his beastly plants and insects."

"The old fogey's the wrong man to hold up then," commented Menzies; and with that the matter dropped.

FOR a few weeks the remittance men lounged round Carristown. On Mondays, when they drew their money, Alger got gloriously drunk, and Menzies gambled with anyone who happened to be on the spree in town. By Friday they were usually penniless, and the landlord of the Carristown saloon knew better than to give credit to remittance men.

One Friday afternoon they lay together in the shade of the bush, idly smoking and talking over the good olti times they had had in England. The heat was intense, and suddenly Alger gasped:

"I'd give ten years of my life for a long drink."

"This can't go on," said Menzies. "I've stood this place about as long as I can. It's enough to make a fellow take to work."

"Or to holding up people in the bush," grunted Alger.

"Are you game for anything that means money— big money?" said Menzies quickly.

"Am I game? Why, I'd half-murder a man for a drink."

"You know the bank," said Menzies quietly. "Old Burke goes out botanising every Sunday. It's left alone all day, and there's no one at that end of the town In the morning. All the people are either in church or at the saloon."

"Well, what of that?"

"Didn't you hear of the bank robbery, at Speedwell last week? It's only a hundred miles away. If we could get at this bank and loot it, people will put it down to the same gang. There's only a trumpery safe in the bank office. A strong man with a sledge-hammer and a cold chisel could break into it in half an hour."

"How do you make out people would not suspect us?"

"We'll go away to-morrow 'possum hunting, pretending that we are going to camp out for a day or so. Then we will sneak back at night and lie under cover of the bush at the back of the bank. It runs up quite close there. When.Burke clears out, we could break into the premises at the back, force the safe, take all the cash, and hide it in the bush."

"Hiding be hanged! I'd run for Sydney."

"You might as well go and ask to be arrested. People know just how we're fixed about money. If we cleared for Sydney after the robbery, everyone would put it down to us. No! We'd hide the money and stay here for a month or so. Then we could pretend that we were sick of doing nothing, and apply for a job at some station fifty miles off. We'd chuck the job in a week or two, dig up the money and then have the time of our lives in Sydney."

"Six weeks more up-country here! I can't stand it!"

"You'll have to stand it for the rest of your life, or exchange it for a gaol, if you can't endure it for six weeks. Why, it's monthly pay-day at the stations round about next week. There'll be thousands of pounds pf gold at the bank."

"But can we get the tools?"

"Simmons, the blacksmith, has gone to Blantyre station to set right their shearing-machines. I heard him say he'd be a week away. We can get what tools we like by just unlatching his smithy door. He never bothered to lock it."

"Can we break Into the safe, though? Wouldn't it be better if we got in, laid, old Burke out, and took the keys from him."

"He wouldn't be laid out without a fight You know yourself what he did twenty years ago. And we should have to kill him, or he'd recognise us and set the police on our tracks."

"You're afraid of your blessed skin, Menzies. The old beast's lived long enough."

"Here, I'll risk a gaol, but I'm not going to risk my neck. Is it a deal?"

Alger nodded assent and then burst forth: "But I should like to take it out of the old miser for the way he's treated me."

THAT NIGHT Menzies was asking the constabulary sergeant about the places in the hush where opossums were most likely to be found. He thought it well to let the head of the mounted police in Carristown have full information about his future movements.

"Can scarcely say. Mr. "Menzies. Keep to the bush tracks myself. Scarcely time to go looking for 'possum. But here's Mr. Burke— he can tell you if any man can."

Menzies repeated his question to the bank manager. Burke gazed interestedly at him through his spectacles.

"The best place I should say, Mr. Menzies, is amongst the gum-trees by Tara Creek, about twenty miles north-west from here. Going 'possum-hunting are you? Well, it's an occupation of a sort, but I wonder that a man of your intelligence and leisure doesn't study the remarkable plants of this district, instead of smoking opossums out of hollow trees."

The sergeant-interposed: "There are not so many as keen on plants as you, Mr. Burke. By the way, aren't you a bit afraid of leaving your bank on Sundays to go looking for plants after this raid at Speedwell?"

The bank manager's eyes twinkled. "Well, considering the girls from miles round come to church, I don't think many of the mounted police are likely to leave Carristown on Sundays. But besides the police, I have an efficient guard. Good-night, sergeant. Good-night, Mr. Menzies."

"An efficient guard!" thought Menzies. "What the dickens does the old fellow mean? I never saw anyone on watch on a Sunday."

As he lounged about the town that evening talking to idlers he artfully drew the conversation to Burke and the bank. From no one, however, could he get a hint of what the "efficient guard" might be.

Finally he made up his mind that it was all bluff on the part of the bank manager.

THE NEXT MORNING Menzies and Alger borrowed horses and rode away. People chaffed them as they left about their hunting prospects. The landlord of the "Shearers' Rest" playfully promised to eat all the opossums they brought back at one sitting. The remittance men took all the chaff in sood part. It was their game that the departure from town should he well advertised. They rode along the vague bushtracks till they reached Tara Creek. Then they spent a few hobrs 'possum-hunting with some success. Afterwards they lit a camp-fire and let it burn itself out, so that it might seem as if a party had spent the night around it. Then they concealed, their horses in the thickest and loneliest bush they could find, and set off on their walk back to Carristown.

Alger grumbled unceasingly at the exertion.

"I don't see why we shouldn't ride back within five miles," he complained. "Can't you see that the police will be out looking for tracks directly the robbery is discovered? If they found that we had ridden back close to town they'd be suspicious at once; but they will never suspect us of tramping back from Tara Creek."

So they continued their weary walk through the bush, now stopping to consult their compass by the light of the moon, now making a detour to avoid

an impervious mass of wait-a-bit thorns, By dawn on Sunday morning they were safely concealed in the bush behind Carristown Bank. They found the tools that Menzies had conveved from the blacksmith's shop safe in the hollow tree in which he had concealed them.

Then they had to wait to see if Burke moved out.

What if he should stay at home that day? They had an anxious hour, till at seven o'clock they saw him stroll out with his tin plant case in his hand. He turned into the bush not fifty yards from them, and the remittance men gave a sigh of relief. They gave him half an hour to get clear away, and then crept to the back of the bank premises. They soon wrenched open a small window, and Menzies slipped in and opened the door for Alger, whose huge shoulders could not be forced through the window.

"Now we're all right," said Menzies; "an hour's work and we shall be able to loot the safe. Lucky it's in the back room, else someone passing before the bank might hear us at work. But we'll look all round before we begin. The old fellow said something about 'an efficient guard.' I think he was bluffing, but we must make sure that there is no alarm of any kind connected with the safe."

They looked at the safe minutely, but could find nothing suspicious. Then they piled rugs round the inner door so that they might prevent any noise they made being heard in the street

"Now, Alger," said Menzies, "well put that strength of yours to a good use for once. You take the sledge, whilst I hold the cold chisels. Now strike Just where I show you. The weak part of a safe is always at the side where the hinges are fitted."

Alger looked at his accomplice and grinned. "You seem to know all about it," he said. "I should reckon this isn't the first safe you've tampered with."

Menzies smiled. "I judge both of us have had interesting careers," he answered quietly.

At first the safe did not seem to yield to Alger's furious blows. The sweat ran down his forehead. He dashed it out of his eyes, and the expression of his face grew more and more savage as lie tattered the safe. At last a lucky blow hit the safe at the exact point where it was welded, and the chisel penetrated.

"That's all right" said Menzies. "Now follow the line of the weld, and it will split right down."

Just as they were both levering together and the safe was yielding to their efforts, Menzies started, and held up his hand for silence.

"What's up?" whispered Alger.

"Someone is unlocking the outer door," replied his companion. They heard a key turning in the lock.

Alger gripped his heavy sledgehammer, and stood by the inner door with a savage look. They heard Burke's voice, apparently talking to himself, as he crossed tho outer room: "To think that I should have forgotten you, my pet cat, you shan't go without your breakfast I'm bringing the milk for you."

He pushed open the door of the inner room. As he did so Alger brought down the heavy sledge-hammer full tilt upon his head. Burke fell like a stone. A saucer that was in his hand smashed on the floor.

"You fool; you've hit too hard! You've killed him!" exclaimed Menzies.

"Shouldn't have got in my way," grumbled Alger. "What's he come back to feed his blessed cat for?"

"Come on," said Menzies with a shudder, "let's clear the safe and get away from this. It means the gallows now if we're caught here." In another minute they had greatly increased the crevice in the safe.

"I can get my hand in," said Alger, suiting, the action to the word. "Let's see if I can reach the coin without doing anything more.

"Can't reach anything," he continued. "We must open it six inches more. Aye—what's that? Scratched myself on something."

He grasped his lever and bent furiously to work.

Soon they had the safe open to a practicable extent.

"There it is— the gold all in bags; but, look, man— *look*!"

Menzies peered through the cleft and saw a little flat-headed snake curled up on the floor of the safe. It was watching them with its wicked little eyes.

"Smash it with your hammer, man," Menzies exclaimed.

"But it's bitten me; it bit me when I first put my hand in. That's what the old fool was going to feed. I settled him, anyhow."

Directly the snake was killed Menzies hastily grabbed the bags of gold from the safe and piled them on the table.

"Here, Menzies," cried Alger, "my arm's turning stiff. You must go and get me a doctor and some whisky at once— a lot of whisky— gallons. They say it cures snake-bites."

"You forget the dead man lying there! Fetch a doctor, and we both hang."

"Fetch, a doctor— this isn't a death for a man. I'd rather die a clean death by hanging. Get one, hang you, or it will be the worse for you! The stiffness is creeping over me."

"I'll go," said Menzies, with a quick glance at his accomplice writhing in pain.

Menzies turned to leave the room, and as he did so grabbed the bags of gold from the table.

The dying man swore a fearful oath.

"Leaving me to die like a dog whilst you get away with thousands. You'll stop with me."

By a tremendous effort he staggered across the room, snatched his revolver from the table, and fired almost at random.

A bullet hit Menzies in the spine. He gasped, dropped the gold, and throwing up his hands, fell a convulsive heap on the floor.

"Done you!" groaned Alger. "You won't go doing the grand in Sydney now— the room's going dark."

And then the revenge of the dead was complete.

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9: Avalon Bay

H. de Vere Stacpoole

1863-1951

Popular Magazine 20 Dec 1916

Henry de Vere Stacpoole

One of a series under the series title "Sea Plunder", featuring Captain Michael Blood. The series, published in The Popular Magazine, is:

1: The Captain Gets a Ship
2: The Yan-Shan
3: A Cargo of Champagne
4: Avalon Bay
5: The Big Haul.

AVALON BAY, on the east of Santa Catalina Island, clips between its two horns a little sea-side town unique of its kind.

Billy Harman had described it to Captain Blood as a place where you saw girls bathing in Paris hats. However that may be, you see stranger things than this at Avalon.

It is the head center of the big-game fisheries of the California coast. Men come here from all parts of America and Europe to kill tarpon and yellowtail and black sea bass, to say nothing of shark, which is reckoned now as a game fish. Trippers come from Los Angeles to go round in glass-bottomed boats and inspect the sea gardens, and bank presidents, Steel Trust men, and millionaires of every brand come for their health.

You will see monstrous shark gallowsed on the beach and three-hundred pound bass being photographed side by side with their captors, and you will have the fact borne in on you that the biggest fish that haunt the sea can be caught and held and brought to gaff with a rod weighing only a few ounces and a twenty-strand line that a child could snap.

Every one talks fish at Avalon, from the boatmen who run the gasoline launches to the latest-arrived man with a nerve breakdown who has come from the wheat pit or Wall Street to rest himself by killing sharks or fighting tuna, every one. Here you are estimated not by the size of your bank balance, but by the size of your catch. Not by your social position, but by your position in sport, and here the magic blue or red button of the Tuna Club is a decoration more prized than any foreign order done in diamonds.

Colonel Culpepper and his daughter, Rose, were staying at Avalon just at the time the *Yan Shan* business occurred on San Juan. The colonel hailed from the Middle West and had a wide reputation on account of his luck and his millions. Rose had a reputation of her own; she was reckoned the prettiest girl wherever she went, and just now she was the prettiest girl in Avalon.

This morning, just after dawn, Miss Culpepper was standing in the veranda of the Metropole Hotel, where the darkies were dusting mats and putting the cane chairs in order. Avalon was still half in shadow, but a gorgeous morning hinted of itself in the blue sky overhead and the touch of dusk-blue sea visible from the veranda. The girl had come down undecided as to whether she would go on the water or for a ramble inland, but the peep of blue sea decided her. It was irresistible, and, leaving the hotel, she came toward the beach.

No one was out yet. In half an hour or less the place would be alive with boatmen, but in this moment of enchantment not a soul was to be seen either on the premises of the Tuna Club or on the little *plage* or on the shingle, where the small waves were breaking, crystal clear, in the first rays of the sun.

She came to a balk of timber lying close to the water's edge, stood by it for a moment, and then sat down, nursing her knees and contemplating the scene before her— the sun-smitten sea looking fresh, as though this were the first morning that had ever shone on the world, the white gulls flying against the blue of the sky, the gasoline launches and sailing boats anchored out from the shore and only waiting the boatmen, the gaffers, the men with rods, and the resumption of the eternal business— Fish.

The sight of them raised no desire in the mind of the gazer; she was tired of fish. A lover of the sea, a fearless sailor and able to handle a boat as well as a man, she was still weary of the eternal subject of weights and measures; she had lived in an atmosphere of fish for a month, and, not being much of a fisherwoman, she was beginning to want a change, or, at all events, some new excitement. She was to get it.

A crunching of the shingle behind her made her turn. It was Aransas Joe, the first boatman out that morning, moving like a seal to the sea and laden with a huge can of bait, a spare spar, two sculls, and a gaff.

Anything more unlovely than Aransas Joe in contrast with the fair morning and the fresh figure of the girl, it would be hard to imagine. Walleyed, weather-stained, fish-scaled, and moving like a plantigrade, he was a living epitome of longshore life and an object lesson in what it can do for a man.

Joe never went fishing; the beach was his home, and sculling fishermen to their yawls his business. The Culpeppers were well known to him.

"Joe," said the girl, "you're just the person I want. Come and row me out to our yawl."

"Where's your gaffer an' your engine man?" asked Joe.

"I don't want them. I can look after the engine myself. I'm not going fishing."

"Not goin' fishin'," said Joe, putting down his can of bait and shifting the spar to his left shoulder; "not goin' fishin'! Then what d'you want doin' with the yawl?"

"I want to go for a sail— I mean a spin. Go on, hurry up and get the dinghy down."

Joe relieved himself of the spar, dropped the gaff by the bait tin, and scratched his head. It was his method of thinking.

Unable to scratch up any formulable objection to the idea of a person taking a fishing yawl out for pleasure and not for fish, yet realizing the absurdity of it, he was dumb. Then, with the sculls under his arm, he made for a dinghy beached near the water edge, threw the sculls in, and dragged the little boat down till she was half afloat. The girl got in, and he pushed off.

The *Sunfish* was the name of the Culpeppers' yawl, a handy little craft rigged with a Buffalo engine so fixed that one could attend to it and steer at the same time.

"Mind you, and keep clear of the kelp," said Joe, as the girl stepped from the dinghy to the larger craft, "if you don't want your propeller tangled up." He helped her to haul the anchor in, got into the dinghy, and shoved off.

"I'll be back about eight or nine," she called after him.

"I'll be on the lookout for you," replied he.

Then Miss Culpepper found herself in the delightful position of being absolutely alone and her own mistress, captain and crew of a craft that moved at the turning of a lever, and able to go where she pleased. She had often been out with her father, but never alone like this, and the responsible-irresponsible sensation was a new delight in life which, until now, she had never even imagined.

She started the engine, and the *Sunfish* began to glide ahead, clearing the fleet of little boats anchored out and rocking them with her wash; then, in a grand curve, she came round the south horn of the bay opening the coast of

the island and the southern sea blue as lazulite and speckless to the far horizon.

"This is good," said Miss Culpepper to herself; "almost as good as being a sea gull."

Sea gulls raced her, jeered at her, showed themselves to her, now honey yellow against the sun, now snowflake white with the sun against them, and then left her, quarreling away down the wind in search of something more profitable.

She passed little bays where the sea sang on beaches of pebble, and deepcut cafions rose-tinted and showing the green of fern and the ash green of snake cactus and prickly pear. Sea lions sunning themselves on a rock held her eye for a moment, and then, rounding the south end of the island, a puff of westerly wind all the way from China blew in her face, and the vision of the great Pacific opened before her, with the peaks of San Clemente showing on the horizon twenty-four miles away to the southwest.

Not a ship was to be seen, with the exception of a little schooner to southward. She showed bare sticks, and Miss Culpepper, not knowing the depth of the water just there, judged her to be at anchor.

Here, clear of the island barrier, the vast and endless swell of the Pacific made itself felt, lifting the *Sunfish* with a buoyant and balloonlike motion. Steering the swift-running boat across these gentle vales and meadows of ocean was yet another delight, and the flying fish, bright like frosted silver, with black, sightless eyes, chased her now, flittering into the water ahead of the boat like shaftless arrowheads shot after her by some invisible marksman.

The great kelp beds oiled the sea to the northward, and, remembering Joe's advice, but not wishing to return yet a while, the girl shifted the helm slightly, heading more for the southward and making a beam sea of the swell. This brought the schooner in sight.

It was now a little after seven, and the appetite that waits upon good digestion, youth, and perfect health began to remind Miss Culpepper of the breakfast room at the Metropole, the snowwhite tables, the attentive waiters. She glanced at her gold wrist watch, glanced round at Santa Catalina, that seemed a tremendous distance away, and put the helm hard astarboard.

She had not noticed during the last half minute or so that the engine seemed tired and irritable. The sudden shift of helm seemed to upset its temper still more, and then, all of a sudden, its noise stopped and the propeller ceased to revolve.

Miss Culpepper, perhaps for the first time in her life, knew the meaning of the word "silence." The silence that spreads from the Horn to the Yukon, from Mexico to Hongkong, held off up to this by the beat of the propeller and the

pur of the engine, closed in on her, broken only by the faint ripple of the bow wash as the way fell off the boat.

She guessed at once what was the matter, and confirmed her suspicions by examining the gasoline gauge. The tank was empty. Aransas Joe, whose duty it was, had forgotten to fill it up the night before.

Of all breakdowns this was the worst, but she did not grumble; the spirit that had raised Million Dollar Culpepper from nothing to affluence was not wanting in his daughter.

She said, "Bother!" glanced at Santa Catalina, glanced at the schooner, and then, stepping the mast of the yawl, shook out her sail to the wind. She was steering for the schooner. It was near, the island was far, and she reckoned on getting something to cat to stay her on the long sail back; also, somehow, the sudden longing for the sight of a human face and the sound of a human voice in that awful loneliness on whose fringe she had intruded had fallen upon her. There were sure to be sailormen of some sort upon the schooner, and where there were sailormen there was sure to be food of some sort.

But there was no one to be seen upon the deck, and, as she drew closer, the atmosphere of forsakenness around the little craft became ever apparent. As she drew closer still she let go the sheet and furled the sail. So cleverly had she judged the distance that the boat had just way enough on to bring it rubbing against the schooner's starboard side. She had cast out the port fenders, and, standing at the bow with the boat hook, she clutched onto the after channels, tied up, and then, standing on the yawl's gunwale, and, with an agility none the less marked because nobody was looking, scrambled on board. She had not time to more than glance at the empty and desolate deck, for scarcely had her foot touched the planking when noises came from below. There were people evidently in the cabin and they were shouting.

Then she saw that the cabin hatch was closed, and, not pausing to consider what she might be letting out, the girl mastered the working of the hatch fastening, undid it, and stepped aside.

The fore end of a sailorman emerged, a broad-faced, blue-eyed individual blinking against the sunlight. He scrambled on deck, and was followed by another, dark, better looking, and younger.

Not a word did these people utter as they stood taking in everything round them from the horizon to the girl.

Then the first described brought his eyes to rest on the girl.

"Well, I'm darned!" said he.

ii

LET ME interpolate now Mr. Harman's part of the story in his own words.

"When Cap Ginnell bottled me and Blood in the cabin of the *Heart of Ireland*,' said he, "we did a bit of shoutin' and then fell quiet. There ain't no use in shoutin' against a two-inch thick cabin hatch overlaid with iron platin', He'd made that hatch on purpose for the bottling of parties; must have, by the way it worked and by the armamints on it.

"You may say we were mugs to let ourselves be bottled like that. We were. Y' see, we hadn't thought it over. We hadn't thought it would pay Ginnell to abandon the *Heart* for a derelick schooner better found and up to her hatches with a cargo of champagne, or we wouldn't have let him fool us down into the cabin like we did and then clap the hatch on us, Leavin' alone the better exchange, we hadn't thought it would be nuts to him to do us in the eye. Mugs we were, and mugs we found ourselves, sittin' on the cabin table and listenin' to the blighter clearin' the crew off. There weren't no chance of any help from them. Chows they were, carin' for nothin' s'long as their chests an' opium pipes was safe.

"The skylight overhead was no use for more'n a cat to crawl through, if it'd been open, which it wasn't, more'n an inch, and fastened from the deck side. Portholes! God bless you, them scuttles wasn't big enough for a cat's face to fit in.

"I says to Blood: 'Listen to the blighters! Oh, say, can't we do nuthin', sittin' here on our beam ends? Ain't you got nuthin' in your head? Ain't you got a match in your pocket to fire the tub and be done with it?'

" 'It'll be lucky for us,' says Blood, 'if Cap Ginnell doesn't fire her before he leaves her.' With that, I didn't think anythin' more about matches. No, sir! For ha'f an hour after the last boatload of Chows and their dunnage was off the ship and away I was sniffin' like a dog at the hatch cover for the smell of smoke, and prayin' to the A'mighty between sniffs.

"After that we rousted round to see how we were fixed up for provisions and water. We found grub enough for a month, and in one of the bunks a breaker ha'f filled with water. Now that breaker must have been put there for us by Ginnell before we left the *Heart* to 'xamine the derelick schooner. He must have fixed in his mind to do us in and change ship right from the first. I remarks on this to Blood, and then we starts a hunt for tools to cut our way out of there, findin' nuthin' serviceable but cutlery ware an' a corkscrew. Two prong forks and knives wore thin with usin' weren't what we were searchin' for; a burglar's jimmy, blastin' powder, and a drill was more in our line, but there weren't any, so we just set to with the knives, cuttin' and scrubbin' at the tender parts of the hatch, more like tryin' to tickle a girl with iron stays on her than any useful work, for the plates on that hatch would 'a' given sniff to the

plates on a battleship, till I give over and just sat down on the floor cursin' Schwab and the Steel Trusts and Carnegie and Ginnell and the chap that had forged them plates from the tip of his hammer to the toe of his boots. 'Oh, why the blazes,' says I, 'weren't we born rats! There's some sense in rats; rats would be out and on deck, while here's two chaps with five fingers on each fist and men's brains in their heads bottled and done for, scratchin' like blind kittens shet up in a box, and all along of puttin' their trust in a swab they ought to have scragged when they had the chanst.'

"Oh, shet your head!' says Blood.

" 'Shet yours,' says I. 'I'm speakin' for both of us; it's joining in with that skrimshanker's done us. Bad comp'ny, neither more nor neither less, and I'm blowed if I don't quit such and their likes and turn Baptis' minister ii I ever lay leg ashore again.' Yes, that's what I says to Cap Blood; I was that het up I laid for everythin' in sight. Then I goes on at him for the little we'd done, forgettin' it was the tools were at fault. 'What's the use,' says I, 'tinkerin' away at that hatch? You might as well be puttin' a blister on a bald head, hopin' to raise hair. Here we are, and here we stick,' I says, 'till Providence lets us out.'

"The words were scarce out of my head when he whips out Ginnell's gun, which he was carryin' in his pocket and hadn't remembered till then. I thought he was goin' to lay for me, till he points the mouth of it at the hatch and lets blaze. There were three ca'tridges in the thing, and he fires the three, and when I'd got back my hearing and the smoke had cleared a bit there was the hatch starin' at us unrattled, with three spelters of lead markin' it like beauty spots over the three dimples left by the bullets.

"All the same, the firin' done us good— sort of cleared the air like a thunderstorm— and I began to remember I'd got a mouth on me and a pipe in my pocket. We lit up and sat down, him on the last step of the companionway and me on the table side, and then we began to figure on what hand Providence was like to take in the business.

"I says to him: 'There's nothin' *but* Providence left, barrin' them old knives and that corkscrew, and they're out of count. We're driftin' on the *Kuro Shiwo* current, aimin' right for the Horn, you may say, but there's the kelp beds, and they're pretty sure to hold us a bit. They're south of us, and Santa Catlina's east of them, with lots of fishin' boats sure to be out, and it's on the cards that some of them jays will spot us. "Derelick" is writ all over us—bare sticks and nothin' on deck, and sluin' about to the current like a drunk goin' home in the mornin'.'

"The cap he cocks his eye up at the telltale compass fixed on the beam overhead of him. It cheered him up a bit with its deviations, and he allowed

there might be somethin' in the Providence business if the kelp beds only held good.

" 'Failin'? them,' he says, 'it's the Horn and a clear sea all the way to it, with the chance of bein' passed be day or rammed at night by some rotten freighter. I don't know much about Providence,' he says, 'but if you give me the choice between the two, I'll take the kelp beds.'

"Blood hadn't no more feelin's for religion in him than a turkey. He was a book-read man, and I've took notice that nothin' shakes a sailorman in his foundations s' much as messin' with books.

"I don't say my own religious feelin's run equal, but they gets me by the scruff after a jag and rubs me nose in it, and they lays for me when I'm lonely, times, with no money or the chanst of it in sight; times, they've near caught me and made good on the clutch, so's that if I'm not bangin' a drum in the Sa'vation Army at this present minit it's only be the mercy of Providence. I've had close shaves, bein' a man of natural feelin's, of all the traps laid for such, but Blood he held his own course, and not bein' able to see that the kelp beds might have been put there by Providence to hold us a bit— which they were— and give us a chanst of bein' overhauled before makin' a long board for the Horn and sure damnation, I didn't set out to 'lighten him.

"Well, folks, that day passed somehow or nuther, us takin' spells at the hatch to put in the time. Blood he found a spare ca'tridge of Ginnell's, and the thought came to him to scrape a hole at the foot of the hatch cover and use the ca'tridge for a blastin' charge. The corkscrew came in handy for this, and toward night he'd got the thing fixed. 'Now,' says he, 'you'll see somethin'! And he up with the revolver and hit the ca'tridge a belt with the butt end, and the durned thing backfires and near blew his head off.

"After that we lit the cabin lamp and had supper and went asleep, and early next mornin' I was woke by the noise of a boat comin' alongside. I sat up and shook Blood, and we listened.

"Then we began to shout and bang on the hatch, and all at once the fastenin's went, and all at once the sun blazed on us, and next minit I was on deck, with Blood after me. Now what d'you think had let us out? I'll give you twenty shots and lay you a dollar you don't hit the bull's-eye. A girl! That's what had let us out. Dressed in white, she were, with a panama on her head and a gold watch on her wrist and white shoes on her feet and a smile on her face like the sun dazzle on water. And pretty! Well, I guess I'm no beauty-show judge, and my eyes had lit on nothin' prettier than Ginnell since leavin' Frisco, so I may have been out of my reckonin' on points of beauty, but she were pretty. Lord love me, I never want to see nothin' prettier! I let out an oath, I was that shook up at the sight of her, and Blood he hit me a drive in the back

that nigh sent me into her arms, and then we settled down and explained matters.

"She was out from Avalon in a motor boat, and she'd run short of spirit and sailed up to us, thinkin' we were at anchor. Providence! I should think so! Providence and the kelp beds, for only. for them we'd have been twenty miles to the s'uth'ard, driftin' to Hades like hutched badgers on a mill stream. We told her how Ginnell had fixed us, and she told us how the gasoline had fixed her. 'And now,' says she, 'will you give me a biskit, for I'm hungry and I wants to get back to Avalon, where my poppa is waitin' for me, and he'll be gettin' narvous,' she says.

" 'Lord love you,' says I, 'and how do you propose to get back?'

"For the wind had fallen a dead ca'm, and right to Catalina and cover to San Clemente the sea lay like plate glass, with the *Kuro Shiwo* flowin' under like a blue satin snake.

"She bit on her lip, but she was all sand, that girl— Culpepper were her name— and not a word did she say for a minit. Then she says, aimin' to be cheerful: 'Well, I suppose,' says she, 'we'll just have to stay at anchor here till they fetch me or the wind comes.'

" 'Anchor!' said I. 'Why, Lord bless you, there's a mile-deep water under us! We're driftin'.'

" 'Driftin'?' she cries. 'And where are we driftin' to?'

"That fetched me, and I was hangin' in irons when Blood chipped in and cheered her up with lies and told me to stay with her whiles he went down below and got some breakfast ready, and then I was left alone with her, trustin' in Providence she wouldn't ask no more questions as to where we were driftin' to.

She sat on the cargo hatch whiles I filled a pipe, lookin' round about her like a cat in a new house, and then she got mighty chummy. I don't know how she worked it, but in ten minits she'd got all about myself out of me and all about Ginnell and Blood and the *Yan Shan* and the dollars we'd missed; she'd learned that I never was married and who was me father and why I went to sea at first start. Right down to the color of me first pair of pants she had it all out of me. She was a sure-enough lady, but I reckon she missed her vocation in not bein' a bilge pump. Then she heaves a sigh at the sound of ham frying down below, and hoped that breakfast was near ready, and right on her words Blood hailed us from below.

"He'd opened the skylight wide and knocked the stuffiness out of the cabin, and down we sat at the table with fried ham and ship's bread and coffee before us.

"I'd never set at table with the likes of her before, but if every real lady's cut on her bias, I wouldn't mind settin' at table with one every day in me life. There was only two knives left whole after our practice on the hatch with them. Blood and she had the whole ones, and I made out with a stump, but she didn't mind nor take notice. She was talkin' away all the time she was stuffin' herself, pitchin' into Cap Ginnell just like one of us. Oh, I guess if she'd been a man she'd have swore worth listenin' to; she had the turn of the tongue for the work, and what she said about Ginnell might have been said in chapel without makin' parties raise a hair, but I reckon it'd have raised blisters on the soul of Pat Ginnell if he'd been by to hear and if he'd a soul to blister, which he hasn't."

Mr. Harman relit his pipe, and seemed for a moment absorbed in contemplation of Miss Culpepper and her possibilities as a plain speaker; then he resumed:

"She made us tell her all over again about the *Yan Shan* business and the dollars, and she allowed we were down on our luck, and she put her finger on the spot. Said she: 'You fell through by not goin' on treatin' Ginnell as you begun treatin' him. If he was bad enough to be used that way, he wasn't even good enough for you to make friends with.' Them wasn't her words, but it was her meanin',

"Then we left her to make her t'ilet with Blood's comb and brush, tellin' her she could have the cabin to herself as long as she was aboard, and, ten minutes after, she was on deck again, bright as a new pin, and scarce had she stuck her head into the sun than Blood, who was aft, dealin' with some old truck, shouts: 'Here's the wind!'

"It was coming up from s'uth'ard like a field of blue barley, and I took the wheel, and Blood and her ran to the halyards. She hauled like a good un, and the old *Heart* sniffed and shook at the breeze, and I tell you it livened me up again to feel the kick of the wheel. We'd got the motor boat streamed astern on a line, and then I gave the old *Heart* the helm, and round she came, so that in a minit we were headin' for Santa Catalina hull down on the horizon and only her spars showin', so to speak. I thought that girl would 'a' gone mad. Not at the chanst of gettin' back, but just from the pleasure of feelin' herself on a live ship and helpin' to handle her. I let her have the wheel, and she steered good, and all the time Santa Catalina was liftin', and now we could see with the glass that the water all round the south end was thick with boats.

" 'They're huntin' for me,' said she. 'I guess poppa is in one of them boats,' she says, 'and won't he be surprised when he finds I ain't drowned? Your fortunes is made,' says she, 'for pop owns the ha'f of Minneapolis, and I guess

he'll give you ha'f of what he owns. You wait till you hear the yarn I'll sling him. Here they come!'

"They sighted us, and ha'f a hundred gasoline launches were nose end on for us, fanning out like a regatta, and in the leadin' launch sat an old chap with white whiskers and a fifty-dollar panama on his head.

" 'That's pop,' she said.

"He were, and we hove to, whiles he came climbin' on board like a turkle, one leg over the bulwarks and one arm round her neck, and then up went a halalujah chorus from that crowd of craft round us, women wavin' handkerchiefs and blowin' their noses and blubbing nuff to make a camel sick.

"Then he and she went down to the cabin to make explanashions, and the parties in the boats tried to board us, till I threatened themi with a boat hook and made them fend off while we got way on the *Heart*.

"When we were near into Avalon Bay, the Culps came on deck, and old man Culpepper took off his hat to me and Blood and made us a speech, sayin' we'd lifted weights off his heart, and all such,

" 'Never mind,' says Blood, 'we haven't done nothin'. Put it all down to Providence,' says he, 'for if we saved her she saved us, and I ain't used to bein' thanked for nothin'.'

"But, Lord bless you, you might as well have tried to stop the Mississippi in flood as that old party when he'd got his thank gates up. He said we were an honor to merchant seamen, which we weren't, and the great American nation— and Blood black Irish and me Welsh, with an uncle that was a Dutchman— and then I'm blest if he didn't burst into po'try about the flag that waves over us all.

"It began to look like ten thousand dollars in gold coin for each of us, and more than like it when we'd dropped anchor in the bay and he told us to come ashore with him. "Now I don't know how longshore folk* have such sharp noses, but I do know them longshore boatmen on Avalon Beach seemed to know by the cut of the Heart and us we weren't no simple seamen, with flags wavin' over us and an honor to our what-you-callit navy. They sniffed at us by some instinct or other, more special a wall-eyed kangaroo by the name of Aransas Jim, I think it were.

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**Allow me to assure the "longshore boatmen" on Avalon Beach that my opinion of them is not that expressed hereafter by Mr. Harman.—Author.*

"Said nothin' much, seein' old man Culp was disembarkin' us with an arm round each of our necks, so to say, but we took up their looks, and I'd to lay pretty strong holts on myself or I'd have biffed the blighters, lot o' screwneck

mongrels, so's their mothers wouldn't have known which was which when sortin' the manglin'.

"Now you listen to what happened then. Culp he took us up to a big hotel, where niggers served us with a feed in a room by ourselves. Champagne they give us, and all sorts of truck I'd never set eyes on before. And when it was over in came old man Culp, with an envelope in his hand which he gives to Blood.

" 'Just a few dollars for you and your mate,' says he, 'and you have my regards always.'

"The girl she came in and near kissed us, and off we went with big cigars in our mouths, feelin' we were made men. The longshoremen were still on the beach scratchin' the fleas off themselves and talkin', I expec', of the next millionaire they could rob by pretendin' to be fishermen. Blood he picked up a pebble on the shingle and put it in his pocket, and when the longshore louts saw us comin', smokin' cigars and walkin' arrogant, they made sure old man Culp had given us ha'f a million, and they looked it. All them noses of theirs weren't turned up just now. They saw dollars comin' and hoped for a share.

" 'Here, you chap,' says Blood to Aransas Jim or Aransas Joe or whichever was his name, 'help us to push our boat off and I'll make it worth your while.' The chap does, and wades after us, when we were afloat, for his dues. He held out his hand, and Blood he clapped the pebble into it, and off we shot with them helaballoing after us.

"Much we cared.

"On board the *Heart*, we tumbled down to the cabin to 'xamine our luck. Blood takes the envelope from his pocket, slits it open, and takes cut a little check that was in it. How much for, d'you think? Five thousand dollars? No, it weren't.

"Twenty dollars was writ on it. Twenty dollars, no cents.

" 'Say, Blood,' says I to him, 'you've got the pebble this time.'

"Blood he folded the check up and lit his pipe with it. Then he says, talkin' in a satisfied manner 's if to himself:

" 'It were worth it.'

"That's all he said. And, comin' to think of it now meself, it were."

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10: Cousin Percy's Double

Anonymous

From the *London Journal*
Armidale Express (NSW) 7 Sep 1872

JUST IN THE outskirts of a small Yorkshire village there stands, away back from the road, amid some tall wide-spreading elm trees, an old-fashioned house, wherein do eat, drink, sleep, and exist the Misses Grimwood, three elderly unwedded females of a shrunk-up and withered appearance, who represent with great credit that class of human beings known— in somewhat expressive language— as the " vulgar aristocracy."

The Miss Grimwoods were very precise and particular in their manner of saying and doing things, for fear they should appear "low" and " impolite," and too much like the "common people" to be regarded with that respect which their great wealth and small brains ought (judging from the way such things usually are) to confer upon them.

One pleasant day in June, the three old maids sat together in a large bay-window that commanded an unlimited view of the gravelled walk, leading down between two rows of trees to the road, and the road itself that wound its way to wards the little village faintly seen in the distance.

"Elmira, my love," murmured the eldest Miss Grimwood to the next younger, with an air of indolence and languor that was supposed to be fashionable.

"Yes, my dear," said Elmira, with a weary sigh, as if it cost her a great effort to apeak at all.

"Do you suppose Cousin Percy will come out to see us this summer? You know we haven't seen him for four or five years, and I've heard he is very stylish and polite, and so gentlemanly— I do wish he would."

"I don't know, my love," replied Elmira; "I wrote him an invitation nearly ten days ago, but have received no reply. I do wish he would come, he is so wealthy, and handsoi le, and "

"And has such a lovely moustache, Amelia wrote," said the younger sister, who affected to be sentimental.

"Cornelia," said Elmira, with a slight frown, "how much must I remind you that you must not interrupt while I am speaking? It's low, and not genteel. As I was about to remark, I hope our cousin Percy will come, for he will make such a nice match for you, and ydu can get him if you are only stylish and agreeable."

"And has our assistance," said the oldest Miss Grimwood, with a precise air of superior wisdom.

"Yes," assented Elmira, with a bow, "and has our assistance."

Miss Cornelia simpered, and hid her face in her handkerchief, and tried to blush, but failed completely. After this the three, having exhausted their stock of ideas, became lost in an absorbing reverie, thinking about nothing.

"I declare," said the eldest sister, sud denly arousing herself from the state of imbecility into which she had fallen, and gazing out down the walk to the gate, through which a young man, evidently "one of the common people," was just coming. " I declare—what is that vulgar man coming into our premises for? Go, ask the fellow what business he has to intrude on our private grounds, sister Cornelia."

"Oh! uh!" said the delicate young lady addressed, almost thrown into convulsions by the monstrosity of so horrid a proposition, " I— I can't! He's ragged!"

" I suppose that it is hardly proper you should be seen speaking to such a common person," said the eldust, with a great deal of importance; "but what can we do? Our man-servant is not at home, and if he keeps on he will actually come upon our front steps. Dear me, I do wish these low people would know their places!"

After a great deal of talk, it was finally decided that, owing to the extreme urgency of the case, all three should go out and accost the man, and ascertain what business it was that made him presume to defile the ground of the Grimwoods with his loathsome presence. Accordingly, the three arose, and with a very stiff and precise appesrance, that the man might be at once impressed with a due respect for their importance, stalked out upon the porch in Indian file, just as the stranger reached the steps that led up into the house.

"The impudence and buldness of these lower classes exceeds our most credulous belief, sister Elmira," said the elder sister, in a loud, shrill key, that was, of course, perfectly audible to the ears of the man for whom it was indirectly intended.

"Certainly, my love, you are quite right," said Elmira, with a glance of con tempt at the stranger. "They are very unmannerly and impolite, I am sure."

" And— and— ragged," said Cornelia, the youngest, with a little simper, and glancing at the clothes worn by the man.

"I think they should be summarily ejected from the grounds of those who are their superiors, when they have no better taste than to intrude," said Elmira, disdainfully.

"What do you come here for, man?" said the eldest sister, sharply, to the stranger.

A sarcastic smile rested upon the face of the handsome young man— for he was handsome for all the rags— as these various little opinions were hurled

at him, and in reply to the question he produced a letter, and held it towards her at arm's length. Miss Elmira ventured to take the extreme corner of it daintily between her thumb and forefinger, and, as the other Misses Grimwood gathered around with eager curiosity to see to whom it was directed, the stranger glanced at them for an instant from beneath his slouched hat, keenly, sharply, and shrewdly, as if he were better acquainted with them than they were aware of, and then turned to depart.

"Here, fellow," said the eldest Miss Grimwood, tossing a sixpence at him, "take that and go away, do!"

The piece of silver fell directly in the path of the young man, who spurned it aside with his foot, and, continuing his way to the gate, soon disappeared in the direction of the village.

"I declare," said the eldest sister, as they returned into the house, "if that low person ain't awfully impertinent! Refused the money I gave him! How dare he do it? Who is the letter from, Elmira, my love ?"

"Dear me," said Elmira. who had been eager in its perusal, "if it ain't from our dear cousin Percy! It is dated at the village, at which he says he has just arrived, and says he will be here in about two hours. Do run to the window, sister Cornelia, and see if he is not almost here. It is about time. Oh, how pleased I am!"

The youngest sister did as requested, and, after a long and eager, look down the road, returned to report that no one was in sight, whereat the eldest rang the bell, and ordered the servant who answered it, to have the cook immediately prepare a "sumptuous feast," suitable to the rank and wealth of the expected guest. After this, the Misses Grimwood, concealing' their excitement and impatience, for fear it might be " low" to evince such human feelings, sat like three icebergs in the centre of the parlour, and frigidly awaited the coming of their dear cousin Percy.

In due time a magnificent carriage drawn by a pair of splendid black horses dashed up to the gate in grand style, and there alighted therefrom the young gentleman in question, Mr. Percy, dressed in the extreme height of fashion, and dis playing the very embodiment of gentility.

Of course, the Misses Grimwood strove to show him every possible attention and respect, without compromising their self importance, and over and over again expressed the very great happiness they experienced in welcoming their beloved cousin Percy to Grove Place, as the home of the Grimwoods was called by them.

The wealthy and genteel Percy, how ever, did not seem to enter into the enthusiasm exhibited by his fair cousins in the manner they wished and had been led by their own vanity to expect: but, on the contrary, he returned their

salutations in as indifferent a way as he very well could, and still not to be ungentlemanly.

We purpose to let slip by unrecorded the unimportant events that transpired during the first week of Mr. Percy's visit, and narrate the particulars of an occurrence that took place the day before his departure from the home of the Grim woods, and which is very important in this story, as it not only changes the entire hopes and prospects of the three old maids, but also developes into a fact a suspicion the reader may have entertained regarding Mr. Percy.

The two elder of the three Misses Grimwood had been laying their heads together ever since the advent of their cousin at Grove Place to capture the heart, the hand, and the fortune of the genteel and agreeable Percy for their younger and more handsome— it is not saymg much— sister Cornelia.

After a discussion that lasted a very long time, and in which an immebse amount of wisdom was displayed, it was at length decided that the next day— that being the day before Percy's visit was expected to terminate— the two Misses Grimwood should contrive to have Cornelia and her cousin left alone together for a sufficient length of time for him to propose, she to accept, and the day to be settled between them when the happy ceremony that would make them husband and wife was to transpire.

To make as sure a thing of it as possible, Miss Cornelia was called in and given a great many instructions how to act and what to say by the elder Misses Grimwood, who, having been engaged for the last fifteen years in the fruitless endeavour to get married, were eminently qualified to give such advice.

The programme was accordingly carried into effect, and the next day found Cornelia and Percy seated alone together in the arbour, side by side, under as favourable circumstances for popping the question as probably have ever been recorded in the history of any lovemaking.

"What a lovely day it is, cousin Percy," said Cornelia, glancing sideways at the young man. " The gale wafts to my nose the smell of flowers, and— and how sweetly the hens cackle! It seems just like the day you came. What made you send such an outlandish, ragged fellow with your letter, dear Percy— he was awful horrid and vulgar."

Said Percy politely. "What did he do or say, pray?"

"What a question, Percy, for you to ask. Why, he was ragged, and so, of course, was no gentleman. But let us not talk about it— it's so awful. Let us converse about something else."

"Well," said Perty, calmly, "what shall it be— love?"

"Love" repeated Cornelia, as coquet tishly as her age would permit. "Ain't you ashamed of yourself to call me love? Oh, dear Percy, I am not your love, am I?"

"No," said Percy, smiling slightly to himself, "you are not."

This reply, so different from what she hoped, somewhat disconcerted Miss Grimwood at first; however, she soon rallied and came again to the charge.

"And must you leave to-morrow, dear Percy?" she said, drawing nearer, and accidentally of course, laying her hand on his. "Must this parting be so soon? Must—must the cords that have united us in our friendship be severed by the knife of absence, oh, dear Percy?"

"They must," said Percy, with a stoicism against all these blandishments that would have done credit to a philosopher.

Miss Caroline felt that something desperate must be performed, or her chances for getting Percy's hand— and consequently his fortune, which was, of course, the chief point to be gained— would fall through. A little right management at the proper time might effect her object, while, on the other hand, a slight error m speech or manner might ruin her entire hopes and prospects. It was a delicate point, and she felt it.

"Cousin Percy," said she, looking at him tenderly.

"Well," said Percy.

"Your company is veiy agreeable."

"Is it? said Percy, calmly.

"Yes, it is very agreeable to me, dear Percy."

"Ah!" said Perry.

Miss Grimwood was almost in despair

"Cousin Percy," she said desperately.

"Well?"

"Do you think it wrong for cousins— not second cousins, but cousins like you and me— to get married, dear Percy?"

"That will do," said Percy, sharply.

"What?" said Cornelia, startled at the words and manner of her companion.

"That will do," repeated Percy. "You needn t pop the question."

Miss Grimwood was dumb. She could not have spoken a word then had her life depended upon it.

"You needn't pop the question," said Percy, " because I am too 'awful horrid and vulgar' to suit your taste."

"Why, what do you mean!" said Cornelia, burying her face in her hand kerchief with a snivel.

"I mean," said Percy, rising, and standing before her, "that l am the poor ragged, despised fellow that brought my letter announcing my coming. If you treated me mean then, you must now. I disguised myself on purpose to try you and your sisters. I see what you are. I shall leave Grove Place to-morrow, never to return. What is more, I am going to many a poor girl, who is not worth a farthing; but she is beautiful, pure, and good, and I will plainly inform you that you and your sisters are not fit to touch the hem of her dress. Good-day!"

He bowed with cold dignity, and walked out of the arbour towards the house.

Miss Cornelia Grimwood gave utterance to a piercing shriek, that would have established the reputation of a steam whistle for all time to come, and rolling off from the seat on to the ground, "fainted" quite away just aa her two sisters (who had been trying to ascertain how their scheme worked by listening to the entire conversation outside the arbour) came rushing to render her assistance.

The two Misses Grimwood fell upon their knees before their prostrate sister, chafed her hands and limbs, sprinkled cold water in plentiful quantities over her face, poked straws up her nose, be wailed loudly that she was dead, and, in short, performed many other feats of a like nature, with avowed intention of "bringing her to." They desisted, how ever, when they were sure that Percy was out of sight and hearing, and Cornelia, raising herself on her elbow in a most remarkable manner for one in her supposed condition, and gazing anxiously around, said—

"Is—is he gone?"

"Yes, my love," murmured the two old maids in the same breath. "You can get up now, and if he comes back you can faint away again. Cruel man!"

WE WILL bring our narration to a speedy close, by stating that Mr. Percy left Grove Place the next day, and was never more seen in that vicinity.

Within three months after the unsuccessful assault of the three old maids on his affections and his purse, he married the poorest girl (in a pecuniary sense) in all Yorkshire; but one who was the richest in gentleness, purity, and virtue, and all the attractions that go to make home the nearest to paradise of anything on earth.

The three Misses Grimwood still reside at Grove Place, and, although they did not soon forget the mortifying lesson that Percy taught them, they are as aristocratic as ever, never seeming to have learned the fact that hidden beneath ragged clothes may be found true nobility, and that gold does not always glisten, neither are diamonds found without scraping in the dirt.

11: A Real Square Guy

William Slavens McNutt

1885-1938

The Popular Magazine 1 Feb 1912

William Slavens McNutt

American author and Hollywood screenwriter

OLD Charley Nelson, the gambler, sat at one of the poker tables in the Mecca, in Ketchikan, Alaska, reading a week-old *Seattle Times*. At a small side table two longshoremen wrangied listlessly over a game of "coon-can." At another Dick Hesler gnawed his grizzled mustache angrily as he repeatedly failed to win at solitaire. A sudden exclamation from old Charley suspended operations.

"Well, well," he drawled. "Dave Henderson's dead! You knowed Dave in Valdez, Dick?"

"Yep."

Charley read slowly from the paper:

"Dave Henderson, the well-known mining man who struck it rich in the Kuskokwim country, passed away yesterday at his home at Green Lake. Mr. Henderson was a graduate of Yale, and was well known in the North a few years ago. He leaves a wife and four children."

Old Charley dropped the paper, and stared reminiscently into his pipe bowl.

"One real square guy, him," he drawled dreamily. "Yes, sir! One real square guy!"

"Y-e-e-e-e-s?" Dick questioned. "They's them 'd argy it with ye."

"Nope!" said Charley. "They c'n fight it with me. Anybody knocks old Dave from now on c'n git a raise out o' me first whack! I know the talk ye mean— but he wuz square.

"He wa'n't one o' these slob-hearted, sieve-eyed suckers that git a rush o' rain to the face ever' time some barrel-house bum sticks em up with a hard-luck yarn fer the price o' the eats an' a snootful. Not him! He played square to what his common sense figgered out wuz a man's game.

"A guy come's through with a gamblin' debt, an' his wife needin' shoes, an' we call him square! He sweetens the hat with a nice piece o' change when it's passed fer some old sport the booze 'as landed, an' his kids wear his old clothes, cut down, to pay fer it, an' we call him square.

"Square! Yah! Say, me that's trained with the counterfeits, I can spot 'em marked 'Genuine' in the middle o' the deck, an' I tip my Stetson to this Dave person.

"He's fell over the Big Hump now, an'—"

He filled his pipe and lit it carefully. "This Dave party," he drawled on, "I met him first winter o' nineteen —— in Valdez, where him an' his pardner's winterin'. I'm dealin' faro in the Alaskan there. This pardner o' hisn goes agin' the bank right often, an' Dave watches him some, so I git to know him.

" 'Never see you buckin' the game none,' I sez to him one day's we sit in the hotel talkin'. 'Y'ever go agin' it?'

" 'Not the bank,' he sez. 'But poker— yum, yum!' he kind o' laughs a mite. 'Me an' Bruce'— that's his pardner— 'we took four years o' that together at Yale,' he sez, 'an' I sure did learn to love my study! Yes, sir!' he sez, 'they's only three things I like better'n a game o' draw,' he sez, 'a wife an' two kids.'

" 'Ye don't think they mingle friendly in a man's mind, huh?' I sez. 'Yer pardner don't seem bothered that way none.'

"I didn't hanker a whole lot to this pard o' his, an' I reckon I must o' showed it some in my talk.

"Never mind him,' he snaps at me, sour like. 'He can afford it. You deal him a straight game, an' don't worry what he's bothered about.'

"He wuz awful touchy that way. Him an' this Bruce party'd trained together in one o' them college places back East when they wuz younger, an' they wuz sure some thick.

"Come spring o' that year a prospector I knows dropped his whole roll on the bank, an' got nothin' to outfit on. He throws the hooks into me with a line o' gab about a claim that he's got located back on the Susitna, that looks like an acre o' yeller jaundice, it's that rotten with the dust! He'll deed me the half œ this gold farm an' lead me to it fer a grubstake; an' me, havin' a soft berth with a fat per cent in the game I'm dealin', an' the cutest little bank roll, that'd come

when I whistled, that I'd ever snapped a band around, why, I'm nutty with the good luck, an' I fall fer this bunk.

"We git together the dogs an' grub, an' hit fer nature.

"We're four months gittin' to where this bonanza ain't. I'm wise to the bluff six weeks out, but I'm that sore at fallin' fer such a whiskered graft, I stick to spite myself.

"I figgered we might hit somep'n at that. We wuz goin' it jest fool blind enough.

"Come late in August, this cyclone liar that's with me wraps his midriff around the last pint o' our whisky on the sly, to steady his legs fer a trip across a bad piece o' ice on a glacier we come to, an' time I git across I'm shy somebody to talk to, three dogs, one sledge, an' a dern sight better'n half the grub. Say, they wa'n't no bottom to that crevasse! I reckon you scratch China ten foot deep in the right spot, you find that guy where he come through.

"Me, I'm two months o' the busiest kind o' mushin' from any place where two-legged things mussed up the scenery; I got scant grub fer a month, one sledge, two dogs, a six-gun, an' a hankerin 'to live a while.

"Six weeks later I'm five days' husky hikin' from the nearest road house on the Valdez trail; I got my sledge, one dog, an' what part o' one hind leg o' the other 't I ain't eat fer breakfast. Then the blizzard hits me, an' I know I'm dead, but I keep on a-hikin' fer pure cussedness. That's the time my ornery contrariness got me somep'n.

"I'm pumpin' along through the snow, figgerin' on which side er my back I'd rather die on, an' all of a sudden my Malemute howls, an' I look up at the roof of a shack stickin' out of a drift, an' sparks is flyin' from the chimbly.

"Dave Henderson, he opens the door fer me. First off I looked at him I located my gun. I needed that there Malemute o' mine, an' I knowed Dave did, too.

" 'Grub?' sez 'e, soon's ever the door's shut on us.

"I jest fish out that there chawed dog's leg, an' holds her up, an' he nods kind o' tired, an' sort o' hunches his shoulders.

"Bruce, he's a-layin' on a bunk by the stove, half propped up 'th some sacks; they wuz a leather poke o' gold dust in his lap, an' he wuz wigglin' his fingers round in it, an' yammerin' away like a hop-head with a whole skinful o' smoke.

" 'Sick,' sez Dave. 'I dunno what it is. Fever o' some sort. We hit it rich,' he sez, 'an' we stayed in too long tryin' to make a big clean-up. Just had grub enough to make it out. He went bad here— I dunno—five, six, seven days ago. One can o' beans an' a half o' cup o flour left.'

" 'I'll halve the dog with ye if there's any chance fer me to make a get-away inside o' twenty-four hours,' I sez. 'We'll knife him to-morrow.'

"I set down by the stove, plumb dead fer sleep, an' scared to close my eyes. Hungry men's queer, the best of 'em.

"By an' by Dave looks at me funny, an' shakes his head. 'Nothin' doin', Charley,' he sez. 'I ain't that kind. Turn in an' sleep.'

"I take one fair squint at him, an' roll over on the floor, dead to the world, an' peaceful. I ain't been tryin' to outguess men across the poker table thirty year fer nothin'! I knowed he wuz square.

"It's the dog wakes me up. He's got his nose at the door crack, an' howlin' sweet Jemima!

" 'Mebbe somebody stalled outside,' I sez to Dave. 'Better open up.'

"Dave he swings open the door, an'— swo-o-o-osh! That there Malemute he's gone like a fly down a frog's throat! They're cunnin', them dogs. He knowed he wuz due to imitate ham an' eggs.

"Dave shut the door, an' stood lookin' at me. 'That's all,' he sez, 'fer us. The storm's lettin' up, an' you got part o' that leg left. You may git through.'

" 'Can't ye git him started, Dave?' I sez, noddin' to Bruce, mutterin' away in his sleep. 'Might's well blow up in a snow bank makin' a try 's to sit here an' wait fer it.'

" 'Nope!' he sez. 'No use. He can't git up. Legs won't work.'

"Say, look-a-here, Dave,' I sez to him. 'You got that can o' beans. Your chance's jest as good as mine to git through. Nothin' in stayin' here to go out with him. Whyn't you—'

" 'Why, you durn fool, you!' he yells at me. 'Think I'd leave my pardner? Him? Why, you—'

"Scuse me, Charley,' he sez, simmerin' down sudden. 'I know you meant right but I couldn't leave him. Why, him an' me's been— Oh, I couldn't, that's all.

" 'They's one chance in a million here, he goes on, after a bit, ' 'long's I'm here to keep the fire agoin' we may last four er five days yit, an' some stray outfit with grub might stumble onto us.'

"By an' by he begun talkin' o' the wife an' kids.

" 'They aint got more'n enough money to last 'em through till summer,' he sez. 'The boy's the oldest, an' he's only seven. Poor little woman! She ain't got a soul in the world to turn to. That's tough! Just when I've hit it right.'

"Pretty soon he speaks up sudden.

" 'Charley, he sez, 'I'm gonna give ye directions to that claim we located. There's a good hundred thousand there for the sluicin'. Take half, an' split with the missus.'

" 'I'll do it,' I sez.

" 'I believe ye will, Charley,' he sez, slow, lookin' at me hard. 'But it's tough goin' out, with yer wife an' family's livin' hangin' on the word of a gambler ye only half know.'

"We set fer an hour, waiting fer the storm to let up enough fer me to mush, an' goin' over the map he drawed out fer me.

"Then this Bruce party he wakes up loonier'n ever, an' starts blabbin' away.

"We hit 'er at last, hey, Davey, old horse?' he sez, laughin' hard. 'Hit 'er right, hey? I guess I won't make up for these years up here when I git back? I guess I won't rip some floor out o' hell! What? Broadway! Hey, Davey? Broadway! I guess I won't turn the old alley upside down an' spank it! Champagne, old pal! An' girls! Ah, say, girls! 'Member them two juicy peaches from the Chattering Magpie we met when we wuz down to the big town fer Christmas senior year? Hey? Aw, say, Davey, old horse, too bad you're spliced, with all this roll to go through! Too bad, Davey! Ah, say! Girls? I'll buy me the Waldorf an' stock it with 'em!'

"An' he goes ramblin' on like that fer half an hour.

"Dave he sets quiet, not payin' much 'tention, seems like. Bruce's jest beginnin to run down when Dave gits up an' goes to the door.

" 'Mos' stopped,' he sez.

"He goes to one corner, an digs out his parkay an' snowshoes, slips into 'em, an' rams the can o' beans into his pack. Then he goes over, an' sets down by the bunk, an' takes a-holt o' the other guy's hand.

" 'Bruce! he sez. I jumped a foot when he spoke.

"Twa'n't loud, but A'mighty! I never hear a man mean so much in one word!

"It busted that loony spell o' Bruce's like ye'd bust an' eggshell with a trip hammer. He bats his eyes hard, an' looks out of 'em sensible.

" 'Oh! Hello!' he sez.

" 'Bruce,' Dave goes on, steady as a clock, an' awful gentle, 'old pal, I'm goin' to leave ye.'

"Bruce don't answer none, jest looks at him, but ye c'n tell by his eyes he knows what he's heard all proper. Dave goes on, strokin' his hand:

" 'It jest come over me, Bruce; I been seein' things backward. It's the wife an' kids, old pal. I'm all they got, an' I been throwin' them up to stick to you. You're the best friend I got, but, Bruce, old son, ye ain't worth it! They ain't no man worth it! I got to leave ye, old pal. There's mighty small chance fer me to make it through as it is; we'll both be the same in a couple o' days, 'most like. 'Will ye— give me a good word to go on?' Bruce?'

" 'Goin' to leave me, hey?' this Bruce party sez, "All right, ye black-hearted —— ——! Go ahead!' An' he turns his face to the wall.

"I'm sorry, old son,' Dave goes on, gentle. 'I hoped ye'd give me a lift on this. I got the heavy end, old pal. You'll be through with it all pretty quick. If I don't make it out I'll die in a snow bank, feelin' like a dirty cur, an' if I do git away I'll live out the rest o' my life feelin' like I done wrong! But that ain't it, pal. It's the wife an' kids, an' we ain't neither one of us worth them! Lives er feelin's! I know I'm right, but I'll never be able to see it that way if I git out. You know I'm right, son; they's nobody lookin' to you. Won't ye give me the lift of a good word to go on?'

"Bruce don't answer none. Jest lays quiet.

" 'Here's yer gun, old pal,' Dave sez, layin' it in the bunk alongside o' him. 'Mebbe— mebbe you'll want it.'

" 'I ain't got the nerve!' the other guy mumbles, 'thout turnin' his head. 'You know I ain't.'

"Dave don't say nothin' fer a minute. Then he speaks up, an' his voice is shakin' fer the first time.

" 'Old pal,' he sez, 'If ye— if ye want me to—"

" 'Go on, you devil!' the feller in the bunk yells. 'If ye're goin', go!'

" 'Come on, Charley,' Dave sez, an' we hit the trail. We ain't made two hundred yards, an' he stops.

" 'He ain't got the nerve, Charley,' he sez. 'He ain't got it! I know him. The fire'll go out, an—', he shakes his head. 'That ain't square!' he sez. He stands lookin' out over the snow fer a bit, an' all of a sudden takes an awful big breath.

" 'Mush on, Charley, he sez. 'I'll ketch up with ye.'

"I didn't hear nothin' in the next ten minutes. Not me. My ears was plugged. By an' by Dave makes up 'th me, an' we mush on. If I'd knowed what that trip wuz goin' to be I'd stayed in the cabin an' died like a gentleman! 'Nother blizzard caught us four days out, an' we lose each other. He makes one road house, an' I hit another, an' nobody ever knowed we wuz together. I see him three year later in Seattle. What he said about havin' the heavy end wuz right. He showed it. We have a drink apiece, an' jest's I'm leavin' him he sez: 'He give it to me, Charley, the good word!'

"I KNOW! They found his pardner come summer, with a hole in his skull. They suspicioned he shot him! Uhu! Well, the guy knocks Dave Henderson in earshot o' me c'n chuck his dukes an' git busy. He wuz square, him! One real square guy!"

12: The Spider

Vernon Ralston

fl 1907-1920

Evening Journal (Adelaide) 18 Sep 1908

Table Talk (Melbourne) 24 Sep 1908

MR. ANTHONY MOLYNEUX— the real name with which he began life in Poland is unspellable and unpronounceable— sat at the window of his Piccadilly chambers. It was a brisk afternoon, he had lunched well. and consequently he was in his most amiable mood. He gazed genially down on the passers-by. Every now and then he noticed some client, and smiled to himself. It may be questioned if the clients had looked up to the window and seen Mr. Molyneux whether they would have smiled in return.

"Most of these young clubmen come to me sooner or later," thought Mr. Molyneux. "The flies can't keep out of the old spider's web, and then he bleeds them dry, dry!"

He gave a chuckle of enjoyment, and then leant back in his chair for his after-luncheon doze.

Suddenly there came a knock at the outer office door, and Mr. Molyneux was on the alert at once. He heard his clerk answer to the knock. In another moment he brought a card in to Mr. Molyneux.

"A Mr. Cartwright to see you, sir."

"He's a new customer, isn't he, Mr. Smith?"

"I think so, sir."

"What's he like?"

"Young, and a trifle green, sir."

"Oh, tell him I'm engaged at present, but that I'll see him in ten minutes."

Mr. Molyneux believed in keeping his customers waiting. It was his idea that if a client cooled his heels in the outer office for ten minutes he would get afraid that no money would be advanced, and consequently would not be quite so particular about the terms of advance.

Mr. Molyneux sat in his chair for ten minutes; then arranged a few letters on his desk to give the appearance of occupation, and rang loudly for his clerk.

"Make out that cheque, Mr. Smith, payable to the Marquis, and bring it to me for signature. Have those mortgage deeds in connection with the Villiers estate ready this afternoon for my inspection. And, by the way, show in that gentleman. Let me see, didn't you say it was Mr. Cartwright?"

"Yes; well, show him in here."

Mr. Smith replied gravely. "I will see to those matters at once."

No one would judge from the tone that he was told to make out the cheque for the Marquis two or three times a day. This was merely one of Sir. Molyneux's methods of impressing clients.

The next minute a young man was shown into the private office. He was well dressed and looked gentlemanly. Mr. Molyneux's quick eye noted these details. It also noted the dark circles under the client's eyes, and the rather puffy, bloated face. Mr. Molyneux was not a moralist; his mental comment was. "Been going the pace a bit— that's the sort of young fellow like to have here."

"Well. Mr. Carter"— the money lender made a point of forgetting clients' names to impress them with a sense of their unimportance— "what can I have the pleasure of doing for you? Take that armchair; you'll find it a good one."

"Cartwright, if you please, Mr. Molyneux. I understand that you lend money."

"You come at an unfortunate time, Mr. Cartwright, I let a client of mine, the Duke of— I beg pardon, I was nearly indiscreet enough to let a name slip— well, I let him have almost all my spare cash this morning; but still, state your business. If we can't do it to-day we may to able to manage it a bit later."

This was another of Mr. Molynenx's stock speeches. The fact that the Duke had drained him dry always justified him in charging a client another 10 per cent.

"Well, perhaps, Mr. Molyneux, my is familiar to you. My uncle, Charles Cartwright, is the well-known North Country Steel King; he is a bachelor; I am his only nephew, and he has always treated me as son."

"Half a minute, my dear sir. I must just slip out and sign a cheque for my clerk to post."

Mr Molyneux glided into the outer office and turned up two or three books of reference. Until he had gleaned the essential facts about Mr Charles Cartwright.

"Sorry to interrupt you," he said, when he returned. 'You were saying that your uncle a bachelor, and regarded you as son. But bachelor uncles may marry or they may alter their wills. If you required a small advance from me I should want more security than your expectations from an uncle. Now, if you could induce your uncle to back a bill for you, I could advance any amount m reason on his signature. Just bring it me and we can do good business."

The money leader liked to emphasize to young men the value of wealthy relatives' signatures. Some of his most profitable deals had resulted from this. If the signature were all right— good— he could recover in case of default from a wealthy person. If there were anything wrong about the signature, it was better still— he had found that the rich relatives were often very willing to

pay up handsomely to check a nasty family scandal. In this case, however, his wiles were futile. His client shook his head.

"My uncle would as soon think of flying as of backing anyone's bill. He never gave a bill in his life, and if he heard that had given one all my hopes of getting is money would vanish. You see he only allows me two hundred and fifty a year, and it's absolutely impossible for a fellow to live on that in London."

"Pooh!" said the money lender with a wicked leer. "It wouldn't pay for a man about town's little suppers at a restaurant. This is a voluntary allowance, Mr. Cartwright; there's nothing settled on you?"

"No, not a penny. Now, a generous man would have let me have something of my own."

"I can't advance anything on the security of a voluntary allowance. Why, if he heard that you had been trying to borrow he might stop it."

"He would," said the young man emphatically.

"Well, give me security— his signature, say— and we can do business. Otherwise. I mustn't waste your time."

"Oh, the security I've got to offer you is good enough. My old uncle's a curious fellow. I've overrun my allowance once or twice .and he's squared things up for me. Now, when he paid me my half-year's allowance in December, he played a low-down trick on me. He said. 'Arnold, my boy, you don't know how to keep money— now I'll put you to the test. Here's your half-year's allowance; in addition to it I'm giving you 30 £50-notes: show me these identical notes next quarter day and I'll double them. You shall have a couple of thousand for yourself. But if you spent one of them then that thousand's the last money you'll ever get from me.' He means it, too; he old fellow never goes back from his word. So here am I— of course my allowance went in a month— with a thousand pounds in good notes that I daren't spend. Here, look at them."

He tossed a roll of notes across the table to the money lender. Mr. Molyneux examined them minutely, and saw that they were perfectly genuine.

"Well, my dear sir, what do you want me to do?"

"Why, I want to know what you'll advance me on the security of those notes, you giving me a guarantee to return them for my use on quarter-day."

Mr. Molyneux's face brightened. He saw the prospect of a bargain.

"Ah, as it's you, Mr. Cartwright, I could advance as much as a couple of hundred, if you'll give me a bill for five hundred payable the day after quarter-day."

"Two hundred; that's no good. Why, I owe nearly that. No; I want five hundred at least. If you can't lend me five hundred pounds on the security of a thousand— well, I'm going to somebody who can."

"I'm very short of ready money at present. Mr. Cartwright; the Duke took eight thousand only this morning. Then, you know, though I have the security. I shan't be able to use it. If your uncle took the numbers of the notes you'll want those identical notes back again. They'll have to stay in my safe all the time earning nothing. I shall really have to charge you a little extra for that."

"But you'll be making money out of what you lend me."

"Ah, you don't understand the feelings of a business man. Mr. Cartwright— the aggravation of having capital you can't use."

"Well what will you charge me for a loan of five hundred, you giving me a guarantee that you will produce those identical notes for my use next quarter-day?"

Mr. Molyneux solemnly scribbled some figures on his blotting pad.

"I shall have to overdraw at my bankers," he replied, "and the bank rate is exceptionally high mow. But I've taken to you as I seldom do to a client. I fear I sometimes let my personal feelings influence me too much in business. Suppose that you give me a bill for £1,300, payable the day after quarter-day."

"Thirteen hundred pounds!"

"Yes; your uncle might die in the meantime."

"If he did you'd collar my thousand."

"That would mean a loss of three hundred pounds to me," said the money lender. "No, Mr Cartwright. I'm helping you to make two thousand pounds for yourself. Don't I deserve a little bit of the profit?"

"Thirteen hundred for the use of five hundred for two months, with ample security!"

"Then go somewhere else, Mr. Cartwright. Get into the hands of some of these foreign moneylenders, and see how they rob you. It has always been motto. "Treat clients well, and they'll come again.' Give me small profits from regular clients. I may say that I'm just a little pained. I put myself to considerable financial inconvenience to oblige you, and you seem to think that I'm robbing you."

As he concluded this speech Molyneux turned to his safe and carelessly pushed the door to.

The sight of the closing door seemed to overcome his client's reluctance.

"I'll take it. Will you make out the bill and the guarantee to return, to me those identical notes for use on quarter-day. But you must guarantee to forfeit two thousand pounds if you don't produce them."

"There'll be a little extra charge for that," said the money lender. "I must keep those notes at the safe deposit, not in my office. We'll make the bill for thirteen hundred and twenty-five pounds."

Mr. Cartwright grumbled a surly assent to this exceedingly reasonable proposal.

In ten minutes the documents were prepared, the notes placed in Mr. Molyneux s safe, and Mr. Cartwright left with an open cheque for five hundred pounds.

When he had gone the money lender leant back in his chair and laughed.

"Eight hundred and twenty-five pounds profit on absolute security, the young fool. And he'll have to pay the bill when it falls due, or I can ruin him with his uncle. Another fly in the spider's web— a juicy one this time. I hope I shall do more business with young Mr. Cartwright— the more the merrier."

And Mr. Molyneux drank a glass of wine and settled himself for his afternoon nap. He felt that he had earned his repose.

When quarter-day came round Mr. Molyneux waited all day in his office for his new client, but Mr. Cartwright never came.

"Then," said Mr. Molyneux, "the notes are forfeited, and the bill— well, I'll pay that into the bank for collection. I'll sue him on the bill; I might get something. Ten to one the young idiot won't be able to produce the document showing that I have a thousand of his."

He paid the bill and the notes into his bank next morning.

THE NEXT day, as he left his office, a plainclothes officer stopped him at the door.

"Mr. Anthony Molyneux?"

"Yes."

"I have a warrant for your arrest. Unlawful possession of 20 £50 notes stolen from the North-Eastern Bank last May. Anything you may say may he brought in evidence against you."

"Good heavens!" cried the moneylender. "And I advanced five hundred on them. Why, if I'd known they'd been stolen, do you think I'd have given him more than a hundred?"

A clever counsel contrived to get Mr. Molyneux acquitted when the trial came, although the Judge commented severely on his methods of doing business. The disgrace was nothing to the money lender— the loss he could make up from his other clients; but the mortification of having been swindled was a bitter blow to him.

It rankled in his mind that for once the fly had bled the spider.

13: The Obscure Move

Wadsworth Camp

1879-1936

Adventure May 1915

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine Jan 1943

Charles Wadsworth Camp

HIS friends have never understood why Morgan, one of the best of private detectives, gave up the excitements of the trail for the stupid dignity of office management. Morgan, naturally, didn't care to talk about it at first. Time is a good carpenter, however, and Morgan feels now that he may safely stand on the record. Here it is:

To begin with, Morgan was an odd one. If you had questioned him about the deductive method he would have laughed good-naturedly. It is equally certain that the mention of psychological analysis would have sent him to the dictionary for a clue. Common-sense and a sense of humour were his own stock in trade. His specialty was the smooth crook who keeps the money of the carelessly avaricious in circulation. Consequently he wore expensive clothing himself. He smoked large, fragrant cigars of Havana. When on the road— which was nine tenths of the time in those days— he frequented only the most luxurious hotels. Furthermore, he was fast acquiring an appearance of rotund prosperity quite out of key with the best-loved traditions of the stealthy profession. Still, as has been said, he was one of the most successful in that business.

Therefore, when the Duncan Investment Company closed its doors it was not surprising that the victims should have carried their resentment from the formal optimism of police headquarters to Morgan's agency.

Duncan, they explained, had fled with large sums which he had persuaded them to invest through a trifling lure of from fifty to a hundred per cent. They

were law-abiding citizens none the less, and they felt it their duty to society to see that Duncan, who had taken so much, should also receive what was judicially owing to him.

Morgan lighted a fresh perfecto.

"Rest easy," he told his clients. "I'll place Mr. Duncan in an iron cage where you can poke your fingers at him all you like."

After the sheep had flocked out, he gazed about his comfortable office, filled his pockets with cigars, locked his cellarette, and set forth on his adventures.

Morgan took the customary precautions in case the confidence man had his heart set on Canada or a trip abroad. But Duncan was too wary to thrust his head in the lion's jaw through any such first-offense methods. Instead he revealed the attributes of an eel, squirming, dodging, and once or twice nearly slipping across the Mexican border. The stout, good-natured detective, however, seemed to possess a special intuition. Time and again he made Duncan turn on his tracks. Then a very natural thing happened. When the chase got too hot, Duncan, who had been born and raised in Florida, sought ground which would be far more familiar to him than to his pursuer. Yet Morgan, entering Florida, was reminiscent of nothing so much as a fat, grinning cat, approaching the holeless corner into which he has driven his mouse.

When the police channels had run dry, the detective called on that peculiar intuition of his and bothered the lumber, turpentine, and phosphate men until he had located the fugitive in a timber camp far in the wilderness. Morgan was justly proud. Few men, if they had studied Duncan's record, would have dreamed of looking for him in the vicinity of manual labour.

Morgan's work had chiefly lain in comfort-furnished cities, but, by rail, by boat, by springless wagon, he bravely followed the trail. One crisp morning he reached his destination— a group of tiny, unpainted cabins clustered about a sawmill and a commissary.

With a look of high achievement lighting his face, Morgan shook the camp superintendent's hand.

"Peary and Amundsen and Doctor Cook have nothing on me," he said. "Just remind me to jot down my latitude and longitude so people'll believe I've really been here."

The superintendent stared.

"And it's inhabited!" Morgan went on with awe in his voice. "I'll write a book, and maybe get decorated by the Swiss— or the Swedes, is it? Well, I made my dash on your word."

"How come you to suspect he was here?" the superintendent asked.

Morgan's voice fell.

"Perhaps a fortune teller saw it in the cards."

He laughed.

"What you laughing at?" the superintendent asked suspiciously.

"The idea of Beau Duncan's living here! Which may be his stylish bungalow?"

"His quarters, you mean? The shanty yonder with the busted window light."

"And some of the best hotels have stopped paying dividends since he left town. The lobster palaces are all in heliotrope for him. Where's old Beau Brummel Duncan now? At the golf club or leading a black-face cotillion?"

"Naw," the superintendent said. "I allow he's doing an honest day's work on the skidder. That's about three miles from here."

"The president of your company told me you were a deputy sheriff."

The superintendent proudly displayed his badge.

"Maybe it puts us in the same criminal class with Duncan," Morgan said, "but we're paid to work. Let's make a bluff, anyway."

The superintendent led two raw-boned little horses from the corral. He considered Morgan's portly person with a thoughtful eye, then brought a soap box from the commissariat. Morgan mounted to the soap box and thence to the saddle. He settled himself gingerly.

"Don't you worry if you ever run out of razors," he advised. "You might take a chance on Dobbin's backbone. I've tried every means of locomotion on this case except aviating, and if Dobbin gallops it will be that or coming in two. I think animals are fond of you. Use your influence. Don't let this one overdo himself on my account."

Proceeding cautiously, they followed the lumber tramway until they came to an open space where a donkey engine was noisily loading logs on a string of flat cars. At first Morgan thought the workers about the engine were all negroes, but finally he realized that, except for dirt and grime, one of them was white.

"According to the description that ought to be my affinity," he said.

They dismounted and left the horses loose, as they had shown no exceptional aggressiveness, to crop the wiry grass. Morgan followed the superintendent in a wide and casual circle toward the donkey engine. The superintendent, as though he were showing off the activities of the clearing to an interested stranger, frequently stopped to point with broad gestures in one direction or another.

"Better cut that stuff," Morgan warned. "Remember, Duncan isn't any stage crook. He has real brains."

Duncan, in fact, had already turned from his work. He leaned on his log hook, staring at the detective. Then he carefully placed the hook on a flat car, thrust his hands in his pockets, and loafed in the direction of the horses. Morgan and the superintendent quickened their pace. Evidently that was sufficient proof for Duncan, for, with a yell, he threw pretence aside, vaulted a log, and broke into a run.

Morgan started heavily after him, but Duncan was younger, slenderer, and much better conditioned. By the time Morgan had reached his horse and had clambered to the saddle in apparent defiance of the laws of gravity, Duncan was already well away on a sandy track which entered the woods at a right angle to the tramway.

When duty beckoned no chances were too great for Morgan. He set his teeth as he urged his horse to a gallop. Swaying from side to side or bobbing up and down with surprised little grunts, he clutched impulsively at the animal's mane and went in pursuit.

The track wound into the virgin forest. Almost immediately the landscape seemed to conspire lawlessly for the protection of the fugitive. The trees thickened. A dense underbrush sprang up. A growth of saplings cluttered the soil between the trunks. Morgan's horse was a self-centred brute. In worming his quick way among the saplings, he allowed only for his emaciated body. Consequently, the detective had to look out for his own too-solid person. What with lifting one fat leg or the other to escape bruises and fractures against the eager saplings, and what with ducking beneath overhanging branches to avoid being brushed from the saddle, he must have presented the appearance of a grotesque jumping-jack answering to eccentric strings.

Duncan clearly received this impression, for the last Morgan saw of him the other was going through a black, shallow stream, his hand upraised in a mocking and undignified farewell. And the last Morgan heard of him was laughter— unrestrained, joyous, insulting.

But Morgan plodded ahead, hoping that the hummock would soon give way to open forest land where he might wear the fugitive down. The underbrush, however, closed more riotously about him. There were many stagnant pools which obscured and finally obliterated Duncan's trail. Morgan brought his horse to a halt. He half fell from his saddle. He looked about him, for once at a loss.

Yellow slash pine, towering with forbidding indifference in all directions, spread their green-plumed tops in a roof so thick that the sun could force its way through only at long intervals. Scrub palmettos, like huge caterpillars, squirmed along the ground and thrust green tentacles upward from their ends. Here and there one reared its body higher than horse and man. Stunted maple

and gum fought for life in the perpetual twilight, and in the wettest places thick-boled cypresses raised their ghastly frames, strung with moss that had the appearance of matted hair. The ground was soggy underfoot, and the air was hot, damp, and full of decay.

Morgan whistled.

"This," he mused, "is somewhat more of a place than that panorama of hades I paid ten cents to see in Coney Island last summer. Besides, it's several stations farther from Times Square."

He took off his hat, drew an immaculate linen handkerchief from his pocket, and mopped his heated brow. There was no virtue in stubbornness now. Duncan had undoubtedly given him the slip for the present. His best scheme was to return to the lumber camp, where he could arrange to watch the outlets of the forest.

He mounted with considerable difficulty and some strategy, then turned his horse's head. But the many stagnant pools had confused his own trail as thoroughly as they had Duncan's. When the sun set he made a wry face and acknowledged he was lost.

The prospect of spending the night in the swamp was very annoying to one of Morgan's habits. Since his lungs were perfectly sound he had never interested himself in all this talk about outdoor sleeping, but he was ready to back at odds the fact that it couldn't be done either comfortably or beneficially here. The ground was too wet for one thing, and, for another, it was probably friendly to snakes. He had a wholesome respect for snakes. Yet he was certain his raw-boned horse couldn't support him all night. He had already examined him several times to see if his back was sagging.

He tumbled to the ground again, tied the horse to a sapling, and walked to a fallen log. After he had thoroughly searched the neighbourhood for rep-tiles, he sat down and munched some of the sweet chocolate he always carried for emergencies. Then he lighted a red-banded Havana. His heart sank at the recollection that his pocket carried only two more of those luxuries. Ah, well, they would last until the next morning, when he would certainly be back at the camp.

While he smoked, the drowsy wood life of the warm day melted into a new note as the melancholy creatures of night awoke. Morgan shivered. He had never cared for the country. The only birds whose music he understood fluttered along Broadway or in and out of the Tombs.

He sprang upright at a rustling in the grass behind the log. Snakes, he was sure! He lamented his lack of experience with country jobs, but he remembered reading somewhere that hunters build fires as a protection against such rural denizens as lions and tigers. It might work with snakes. He

gathered a pile of sticks and started a meagre blaze. Afterward he lay down, but rest was not easy in the swamp. An owl declaimed its dismal periods nearby; a whippoorwill called disconsolately; a high-pitched, vibrant outcry brought him erect, every nerve alert, his hand on his revolver; some heavy body crashed past; always he imagined furtive rustlings in the grass about him. A case had once taken him to the opera. He had slept through "*Gotterdammerung*," but that was a soporific compared with this.

It began to rain. He saw his fire diminish and die. He fancied the rustlings were closer, and he had no idea what hunters did when their fires went out. He lifted his feet. He hugged his knees. In this unprofessional attitude he spent the remainder of the night without sleep.

When the gray dawn came he looked in vain for his horse. The broken bridle dangled eloquently from the sapling.

Chilled to the bone and wet, Morgan set out, determined to make Duncan pay in some way for this night just past. He imagined the confidence man, at the end of a multiplicity of adventures, completely at his mercy— even on his knees, begging for mercy. What he wouldn't say to Duncan then! Or, if Duncan resisted, what he wouldn't do to Duncan! These pleasant thoughts served to pass the time, but they brought him no nearer the edge of the swamp. When night fell his weariness overcame his fear of snakes and he slept.

By rare good luck he shot a wild turkey the next morning and managed to broil it over a smouldering fire. Near the fire he stayed all day, for it still rained and he felt rheumatic.

Another night came, and another day of rain. He lost track of time. The feeling that he had spent most of his life in the swamp depressed him. As a matter of fact, it was the fifth day when the storm finally ceased.

Morgan, sitting in the warm, bland sunlight, took stock of himself. The prosperous, well-dressed detective who had entered the swamp had become a mass of discomforts to which rags clung. He was undecided as to whether the rheumatism or his lack of tobacco hurt the more. He had only two cartridges left, and from past experience he knew they might not bring him a single morsel. It behooved him to get on his feet and escape from this hole, rheumatism or no rheumatism.

With the sun shining he could be reasonably sure he was keeping to a straight fine. But the swamp was evidently interminable. His lack of success pricked his anger against Duncan. He swore aloud.

"Let me get my hands on that slick article who let me in for this! Just let me see him! Just let me get within striking distance!"

It was about this time that he turned pale and leaned weakly against a tree. He had heard a man shout.

As he opened his lips he wondered if the rain, the cold, the long disuse had affected his voice. Would it respond to his will at this vital moment? It was more than a shout. It was a roar that left his throat. And from somewhere a voice answered, triumphantly, hysterically.

Almost immediately Morgan saw a man running toward him, splashing through pools, waving his arms, crying out incoherently. Morgan straightened and began running, too, in the direction of this figure so like a scarecrow. It was a human being. It meant companionship, conversation, a touch of the world again. Heaven knew he needed all that!

Then Morgan saw that it was Duncan. At the same moment Duncan saw that it was Morgan.

Duncan sprang behind a tree. He thrust his arms out in frantic gestures. Morgan drew his revolver. He walked steadily forward.

"Duncan, my dear, it's struck twelve. Come on out now and take your medicine."

"Gently! Gently!" Duncan called. "I give you fair warning!"

Morgan walked faster.

"Fire away. I'll take my chances."

"Don't misunderstand me," Duncan said. "I haven't a gun. Do you think I would harm a hair of your head if I had? I have a better weapon than that. Come any closer and I'll run like the devil."

Morgan stopped. Vengeance was in his heart, but he permitted himself a glimpse at the reverse of the picture.

"Duncan! For God's sake, don't do that!"

"Then you'll listen to reason."

Morgan smiled again.

"It's a bluff, Duncan. Maybe you can run like Bryan, but you haven't the nerve."

"Be reasonable or you'll see," Duncan threatened. "I'm a human being. So are you, I take it."

Morgan's smile broadened.

"Don't be foolish with other people's money and bet on it."

Duncan pulled at the torn fringe of his short sleeves. He shifted his feet.

"Suppose I surrendered?" he asked. "Where would you find a policeman or a patrol wagon? Could you get me out of here?"

"I can't seem to find a taxi for myself," Morgan replied. "But I'll land you in the cooler yet."

"If we live," Duncan said, "and nothing happens, and all goes well, and *deus volens.*"

"Don't swear in a foreign tongue," Morgan answered.

"Let's confer on the main problem," Duncan proposed. "If you don't agree I'll run and leave you alone. I don't believe you're very good company for yourself just now."

"As far as that's concerned," Morgan grinned, "if I were you I'd hate myself by this time."

"So I do, and I want a truce," Duncan blurted out.

Morgan sighed.

"All right," he agreed. "I'll mark this place, and when we're through you can go play Indian again."

Duncan stepped out. His hair was heavy and tangled. The thick black growth on his face made his eyes seem very large, white, and hungry.

"If I had had you along," Morgan said, "I needn't have been afraid of the snakes."

Duncan came straight to him and put his hand on his shoulder.

"You don't know how good it is to see you, Morgan. I've been denied even the companionship of my horse. He got bogged."

Morgan's voice was a little husky as he asked:

"Say, you don't happen to have a cigar hidden away on your clothes?"

"No, but I retain the essentials."

He produced a large sack of cheap flake tobacco and a package of cigarette papers.

"I never smoked those puff rolls," Morgan said disappointedly. "I couldn't roll one of them if it would get me out of this swamp."

"Permit me to roll it for you," Duncan offered.

And he did it, deftly and lovingly, and passed it to the detective. Then he rolled one for himself, and they sat on a log, shoulders touching, while they smoked contentedly.

"So you're Bob Morgan!" Duncan said. "The famous Morgan! I must confess your present state isn't up to your reputation. You might at least have brought a few necessities in with you."

Morgan glanced at the soiled, tattered figure.

"Beau," he said, "believe me, you're not up to it. If you come any more of that easy money talk on me I'll scream for help."

They both spoke in soft, silky, wondering voices, as though admiring the unaccustomed sounds; and at Morgan's words they burst into high-pitched laughter that was so terrifying in their ears it ceased immediately.

"Glad to meet you, Duncan," Morgan said gruffly. "But I don't want to tap any wires or buy any green goods. Let that be understood."

Duncan shook his head.

"Morgan," he announced, "there is something radically wrong with us."

"Better patent that discovery."

Duncan shook his head again.

"No," he continued. "We're not living up to tradition."

"I'm scarcely living at all," Morgan said.

"For a detective and a fugitive," Duncan declared, "we show extraordinary good sense. Romantically speaking, we should be at each other's throats."

"Cut it, and prepare me another whiff of joy."

But Duncan good-humouredly refused to manufacture any more cigarettes until Morgan had consented to some working arrangement.

The decision to join forces until they had found a way out of the swamp, if the thing could be done, was a matter of a moment. That the chase should recommence once they were out was also agreed to at once. They divided only on the start the detective should give the criminal. Morgan offered half an hour, and Duncan demanded half a day. Morgan wanted to smoke. Duncan was hungry. Morgan produced from his pocket a few small bones to which tiny shreds of meat still clung, and these he kept prominently in view while the other carelessly dangled the paper and the tobacco bag in his fingers. They began to compromise.

By the time they had settled on an hour and a half the sun was down. They made camp. Duncan proved himself more adept than Morgan at building fires. When he had a pile of brushwood blazing he went in search of certain edible roots on which he had largely subsisted for the last few days. He brought some of these back and shared them with the detective.

THE gobbling of wild turkeys awoke them at dawn, and they crept to a clump of palmettos at the foot of a dead cypress. As the sky lightened behind the gibbet-like branches, a row of birds appeared in silhouette. Morgan rested his arm against a palmetto trunk, aimed, and brought one of the birds down.

Duncan patted him on the back.

"You would have made a fortune conducting a shooting gallery, Morgan."

"Yeh. And if I live to tell about that shot up north, I'll feel like a liar and everybody'll know I'm one."

The turkey solved the food problem for the present, and, as long as the sun shone, they knew their chances for speedy escape were good. But the clouds turned black again in the afternoon, and a dismal downpour commenced.

"Doesn't it do anything but rain in this hole?" Morgan grieved.

"We are below the snow line," Duncan explained. "I suggest camping here before we start walking in circles."

They made a fire and by the last daylight gathered a heap of wood.

Duncan regretted their lack of a pack of cards to pass the time. This gave Morgan a thought.

"You don't happen by any crazy chance to play chess, Duncan?"

"I know something more than the moves."

"Three cheers," Morgan cried.

He felt in his pocket and brought forth a small pocket chess board.

"When I'm traveling alone I often irritate myself working problems on this. I was using it on the train only a thousand years or so ago."

They moved closer to the fire, tossed for sides, arranged the markers, and in a few minutes their minds were far away from the swamp and their plight. They were well matched. Morgan, who had the white pieces, opened with a brilliant, puzzling attack on the king's side; but Duncan, with confidence and forethought, combined his forces in a flawless defense. As they recognized each other's ability they took more time for their moves. Morgan would lean forward, pursing his lips, studious lines showing on his forehead, while Duncan, eyes intent on the board, would roll a couple of cigarettes, pass one to his opponent, reach out his hand to the fire, and offer a burning brand for a light. It was very exciting. Perhaps they saw in the game a symbol of their relations—detective against criminal, and both most excellent players. It was very late when Morgan unmasked his rooks and trapped Duncan's knight on the king's line.

Duncan leaned back.

"You play a strong game, Morgan."

The detective was pleased by his victory.

"You're pretty good practice for me, Beau," he conceded. "But you ought to have left that pawn of mine alone. It was a gold brick. Oh! Excuse me for talking shop. Hello! It's still raining."

The storm ceased the next day for only a few minutes. They did not travel far, because Morgan complained of what he called his growing pains.

THAT night they played chess again. Duncan won.

"A game apiece," Morgan said. "To-morrow night'll be the rubber. Waterloo won't be jack stones to what I'll do to you."

But Morgan was in no condition to walk the next day. He lay by the smouldering fire, inclined to complain.

"Another twenty-four hours and you'll be all right," Duncan said cheerfully.

"I'll never be all right again," Morgan lamented.

Duncan dried enough sticks and moss at the fire to make a crude bed. He lifted Morgan from the wet ground, then prepared a soup of turkey bones and roots in the detective's drinking cup. Morgan drank it with relish, but his

ailments occupied his mind to the exclusion of chess. So Duncan sat at his side, watching the fire and trying to keep up his spirits.

The last clouds sailed away in the morning. The cold, wet weather was routed. But Morgan's vocabulary was not sufficiently large to let him walk far at a time. After several attempts he gave up and lay down, groaning.

"Poor old Morgan," Duncan said, leaning sympathetically over him.

"Go to the corner and send in an ambulance call," Morgan answered with a grimace. "Then bid me farewell before it begins to pour again. If you hang around for me we'll both die of water on the brain."

Duncan patted his shoulder.

"For Heaven's sake, don't get delirious— Bob."

For some time Morgan frowned at the fire.

"Beau," he said at last, "I mean it. I haven't got the build for a millstone. Besides, I can't be under obligations. I can't let pleasure interfere with business. If you get out do me just two favours. Send a posse in for me and wire the office to get another man after you as quick as lightning."

"My position is very simple," Duncan answered. "I wouldn't leave you if you offered me title to all the real estate in this swamp."

Morgan grinned.

"Since you're talking shop, Beau, you may be a Southern cavalier and me a Yankee born, but I never took fifty per cent, and I see ten suckers in my business any day where you see one."

"No use trying to get me mad, Bobbie. I'm too selfish to leave you and face this cheerless world alone."

"Well, just remember, Beau, I'll get you. As sure as the whole world's gone to grass and water, I'll get you."

"I admire ambition," Duncan said. "I regret that I can not encourage it. But the problem need not trouble us at present. Let me make you comfortable, then I'll roll you another cigarette."

He carried Morgan to a sunny spot, and gave his limbs a thorough, hard massage. Afterward the detective struggled up and began to walk in a crouching position. Duncan cut a stout stick for him. He took his arm and helped him all he could.

"You're sure full of sand, Bob," he said.

Without answering, Morgan walked on. Now and then he would pause, but always, after a few minutes' rest, he would start forward again. By and by his figure crouched less and his steps grew longer.

He was exhausted when they made camp, but the worst of his pains had left him, and it was he who proposed after supper that they play the rubber game.

"I'm an awful object to think about," he explained. "Men have gone nutty over less. I've got to get my mind off myself. Besides, I'd like to know who's the better man. If I hadn't lost sight of one thing last time there wouldn't have been anything to it."

The game was slow. Each was determined to win, so each took as long as he pleased for his moves. Morgan, when he could scarcely keep his eyes open, suggested that they postpone the finish until the next evening.

"I guess I'm trained a little fine," he said. "I don't want to make a slip."

"It looks like a draw to me," Duncan answered.

"It looked as though I'd get out of this swamp the day I came in, but did I? Study the board. I can see more than one way to slip over a knock-out."

Duncan laughed.

"I'm afraid you'll never win this game."

"I've got to and I will," Morgan said. "I'll bet you three pine trees and a case of swamp water— magnums!"

He folded the board, returned it to his pocket, lay down, and was fast asleep in a twinkling.

They were off by the time the sun had slipped its first long shadows through the swamp. Morgan was convalescent. He walked steadily onward, resting one hand on Duncan's shoulder. They talked of the unfinished game which had assumed colossal proportions in their dwarfed minds. But that rubber was destined never to be finished. It was a little after noon when Morgan said in a hushed voice:

"Beau, wait a minute."

"What's the matter?" Duncan whispered as he stopped.

"This darned swamp's thinning."

"It had occurred to me," Duncan agreed. "I was afraid to speak of it."

"Look at those palmetto clumps," Morgan went on excitedly. "They're not as high or as thick. There isn't as much water. Beau, old boy, I believe we're going to get out!"

"There's certainly higher ground ahead," Duncan answered. "Come on, Bobbie."

"Beau! Think of the food and the cigars!"

"Oh, you won't have any taste for decent tobacco," Duncan said carelessly.

Morgan made a wry face and rubbed his knee.

"And this rich food isn't all it's cracked up to be. Rich food for the idle rich!"

They struggled through the last of the underbrush and stepped into the open pine forest. There was hard soil or sand beneath their feet. About them the sun laid warm, caressing fingers of light. Insects droned, and birds sang

joyously. Before long they came to trees scarred by turpentiners, and later to a wood road.

They paused and stood awkwardly for a few minutes without words. The road— narrow, twisting, and overgrown— screamed of civilization, of populous cities, and of marts noisy with commerce.

"We've discovered America," Morgan said.

"Yes," replied Duncan. In a moment he added: "I believe you agreed to give me an hour and a half. Therefore, I will resume my travels."

Morgan looked at him with an air of childish wonder.

"So I did," he answered dreamily— "an hour and a half!"

He pulled his wits together.

"Cross my heart, I'll stay where I am for an hour and a half after I lose sight of you,"

"Quite satisfactory," Duncan said.

"Before you go," Morgan began uncomfortably, "I'd like to hand you a few words of thanks on this auspicious occasion."

"There's no question of thanks," Duncan protested politely. "Undoubtedly we were mutually helpful."

Morgan extended his hand.

"Beau, good-bye."

He essayed a little humour.

"That is— so long. It won't be many days before we meet again. I am looking forward to it."

Duncan took the detective's hand.

"This is an eternal farewell. In some ways I regret it. Good-bye, Bob. You're sure you can navigate until you come to a house?"

"Sure. I'll steer into the first drydock I see and have them light a fire under me."

Their hands dropped. Duncan hesitated. Finally he put his fingers in his pocket, pulled out tobacco and paper, and rolled a cigarette. He handed it to Morgan, who mechanically placed it between his lips. Duncan divided the tobacco. He gave a part of it with several papers to Morgan. Then he turned and strode off through the woods.

Morgan sat down. He watched the tall, gaunt figure about which ragged clothing flapped until it was out of sight. Very soon he became restless. He took the paper and tobacco and tried to make a cigarette, but his fingers were clumsy. The flakes spilled, and the thin, slippery paper tore. As his desire to smoke even this distasteful makeshift increased, the picture of Dun-can's deft manipulation came into his fancy and lingered.

He opened the chess board to study the unfinished game. His line of attack was perfectly clear in his mind now. As move by move its beauties unfolded he chuckled quietly. Duncan was helpless. Suddenly his chuckling ceased. There was one obscure move that Duncan might have offered in reply. It would have spoiled the entire combination. Yet it was the advancing of a pawn on the extreme flank, and its immediate significance appeared of minor importance.

"Duncan wasn't wise to it," he told himself.

And after a moment:

"Could Duncan have been hep?"

He puzzled over the board for a long time. He arose and paced back and forth.

"He might have forced a draw with that move," he mused, "or even a winning attack. I've got to know what he would have done. I'll ask him when I nab him."

He took out his watch. Duncan had been gone two hours.

Morgan didn't follow the route Duncan had taken. The memory of his lonely wanderings kept him in the road which brought him before dark to a turpentine camp. He accepted the foreman's hospitality for the night.

He set out early the next morning with the foreman's horse and buggy which he was to send back from the nearest railroad station, five hours away. The road was long and monotonous, but he sat at his ease, smoking bad cigars which he had bought at the camp, and singing snatches of popular songs in praise of his release from muscular effort.

His thoughts of Duncan centred about the uncompleted game of chess. While he was confident that Duncan's capture was only a matter of time, he refused to bother his head with definite plans until he reached the railroad. These few hours, this long journey, were a vacation from mental and physical labour— an excursion in contentment.

The appearance of the country had not altered when the shriek of a locomotive whistle warned him his ride was nearly ended. He touched the whip to his horse for the first time and was soon on the right of way. He saw the glittering lines of steel, a rough section house, and a water tank; but in front of him the woods were as thick as those he had just left. He pulled up, thoroughly puzzled, for he had expected to find a station at this crossing.

Suddenly his curiosity died. His indolent figure stiffened. His hand went to his coat pocket where the revolver with its single remaining cartridge lay. A filthy man in rags was trying to conceal himself behind one of the insufficient tank supports.

Morgan stepped from the buggy, levelling his revolver.

"Duncan," he said, "I warned you it was 'so long.' "

"It's Morgan, of all the world," Duncan answered, but his smile was sickly. "If that train had only stopped I'd have missed this pleasant reunion."

"You ought to be grateful. Nice people are waiting to weep on your neck up North. Come on out and let's hurry home."

"Not so fast, Morgan. I can easily get away from you. But I confess to a strong desire to finish that game. Suppose for that purpose we arrange another truce."

"We'll finish it on the train," Morgan answered with a grin. "I've got you beaten so many ways I blush to think of it."

"Have you?" Duncan asked slyly. "How about that pawn? I win!"

Morgan's mouth opened. His revolver arm dropped.

"You never saw that—"

Duncan sprang from behind his post, and bounded across the right of way for the woods.

Morgan raised his arm again.

"Stop or I'll shoot!"

But Duncan ran the faster. The muzzle of Morgan's revolver was pointed at the fugitive's back. He had brought down wild turkeys. The result was certain.

Then his arm swayed gently to one side. The movement seemed almost involuntary. He pulled the trigger. He sped his last cartridge into the heart of an innocent pine tree.

He thrust the gun in his pocket and started in pursuit. When he reached the edge of the woods Duncan had disappeared. Morgan sank to the ground. He rubbed his knees ruefully. He shook his head. He shrugged his shoulders. Sitting there in a heap he lighted one of his vile cigars.

"That blasted rheumatism!" he moaned. "That blasted rheumatism! It must have jumped to my gun arm. I'll have to report sick. I'm not worth a hill of beans at this business as I am. I wonder if I've got anything besides rheumatism."

As he blew the stinging smoke from his nostrils he smiled reminiscently.

———————————

14: The 800 to 1 Shot

Gordon Stiles

?—1930

Argosy All-Story Weekly 12 Feb 1927

A WW1 war correspondent, Stiles died in a car accident in upstate New York in 1930.

MRS. ANNA CONTI frowned and answered the buzzer. In the dim light of the dingy hail of her East Side flat, she could discern the outlines of a small man whose husky voice inquired: "Got any old bottles, lady? Got any newspapers or rags? Any old brass or copper— anyt'ing you don' want? I pay good price for old stuff."

The woman considered for a moment. The Contis were thrifty people and she was far from loath to exchange anything which might be useless for the desirable American dollars which she and her husband, Joseph, had been pursuing so ardently for all the years they had been in this country. Joseph's vocation of general laborer did not provide much of a margin after living expenses were paid. And their goal was a truck farm somewhere in New Jersey or Connecticut.

Hastily running over in her mind their various possessions, she told the man: "Wait a minute." She disappeared into a closetlike arrangement at the end of the hall and presently called to the junkman to come. He found her looking critically at a dilapidated heating stove with one broken leg.

Mrs. Conti asked: "How much you give?"

"One dollar," replied the other promptly.

The lady shook her head. "T'ree dollar," she demanded.

The man made a disparaging gesture and turned as if to leave. Then he paused, came back and said: "Two dollar," in tones most final. So Mrs. Conti said: "All right."

The purchaser tentatively lifted a corner of his property, shrugged his shoulders and made his way to the street. Two bleary-eyed men, lounging in the sunshine came slowly across at the junkman's hail.

He explained that a silver quarter awaited any one who would carry a small stove from the ground floor back to his wagon which stood at the curb and after a vain effort to raise the ante, the pair shuffled within and shortly reappeared, bearing the latest. addition to the miscellaneous collection in the cart.

Mrs. Conti placed the two dollar bills in her stocking against the return from work of Joseph. He would be glad to knew that she had made so good a bargain.

ii

AT the time when the above events were taking place, Mr. Samuel Tack sat in his East Sixth Street office, not far from Second Avenue, reading his morning paper. Presently he sighed, bit a little harder into the cheap cigar he was chewing and observed: "Ain't no percentage there."

He tossed the sheet aside with a slight grimace of disgust, stepped to the door of his domain, and surveyed the morning.

Sam frequently did this and when it happened, one who knew him well might safely conclude that business was in one of two conditions with Sam— very good or very rotten. In explanation of which it may be offered that when no profits were in the wind, Mr. Tack would stand in his doorway reflecting upon the general toughness of life; when a promising operation was under way, he found the same attitude favorable to the mental working out of his plans.

Many and varied were the enterprises that contributed to the well-being of Samuel Tack. Nothing was out of his line, nothing too small for his consideration, provided there was a respectable margin on the desirable side.

Also, it must be admitted that occasionally— very occasionally— he came a cropper. On the whole, he prospered, not because of his godliness, but because of his shrewdness.

Always Sam's eye was peeled for opportunity. He was as versatile as William Howard Taft and somewhat heavier. He assumed instantly and easily whatever rôle was necessary for the carrying out of his schemes and prided himself upon this ability.

If maudlin sympathy for a woman bereft of her husband would help Sam swing the order to an undertaker who would pay him a commission, he was there with brimming eyes. If enthusiastic activities in the plans for a great wedding party would result in the refreshments being furnished by a caterer known to Sam,that individual forthwith assumed the task of chief arranger,

Where business was concerned, Sam was busier than the "b" with which the word begins!

Reading the papers assiduously had turned out to be exceedingly profitable to Sam. You learned a lot from the papers— who was ill and likely to die, who had a second hand piano for sale, who wanted to dispose of a radio set— oh, lots of things.

This morning, standing there in his shop doorway, Sam allowed his thoughts to run along such channels as they chose; he was not working out

anything. The life of East Sixth Street ran past him at its wonted pace; children bought two-cent hot dogs from oilcloth decked stalls.

Women haggled with push cart peddlers over the quality or price of divers vegetables. OJ' clo' men, bearing on their heads mighty towers of discolored hats, intoned their cries after the fashion of their kind. The sun shone and all was well.

An express wagon, drawn by a bony horse, creaked slowly along the paving. Out of the various aspects presented by the vehicle itself and its motley contents, two items registered in the retina of Mr. Tack's eyes. They were the name "Shapiro" painted in straggling letters on the side of the cart, and a particularly atrocious pot-bellied heating stove which comprised a part of the load.

Mr. Tack paid no attention to these matters; it was not for some time afterward that he realized that the above mentioned details had found a niche in his spacious brain.

ii

IT was the morning of the following day and Sam's face was buried in his paper. He ran through the classified columns, paying particular attention to "Business Troubles." That department frequently steered Sam toward lucrative deals in second hand office furnishings.

One or two remote possibilities Sam marked for investigation, but he saw nothing that appeared very much alive. He then scanned the news columns religiously; suddenly paused, reread a certain story. After which he laid aside the sheet and stared into the air directly in front of his eyes, brows knitted m fierce concentration. The item which had held Mr. Tack's interest follows:

LOSES LIFE SAVINGS IN OLD STOVE SALE

Wife Sells Heater With One Thousand Six Hundred Dollars Hidden Wealth For Two Dollars

When Joseph Conti, of —— First Avenue, returned from work last evening, his wife, Anna, met him at the door with a happy smile. Producing two one dollar bills, she thrust them into her husband's hand with the words: " Two more dollars for the farm, Joe."

"Where did you get them?" he asked.

"For that old stove in the back room. A sucker he was, the man who gave me two dollars for it."

Joseph's face had turned white even as his wife spoke. When she finished, the man rushed wildly into the room where the stove had stood, stared about him and collapsed in a heap on the floor, crying: "My God! The money for the farm! it was all in that stove! Oh, my God!"

A reporter for the Blade *found the pair in an hysterical state. Mrs. Conti, it appears, had no idea of the identity of the junk dealer to whom she sold the stove containing the family savings of twenty years. She had known that her husband kept the money hidden, but did not dream that he had selected the old stove as a receptacle. The police are investigating the matter, but hold out slight hope of recovering the cash.*

iv

THE frown on Sam's face gave way to a satisfied smile. Swiftly the picture rose before him. The creaking wagon— the potbellied old stove— the name, Shapiro, in straggling letters. Enough to go on— for a person of cleverness.

Armed with a knowledge of the junkman's name, if Sam Tack couldn't beat the police to it, he was a bum! Anyhow, it was an eight hundred to one shot, well worth taking on!

There was, of course, the possibility that Shapiro had read the news story. But, in Sam's mind, that was astonishingly remote. He knew his section of the city; was aware that not one in a hundred could read English.

There might be a picture in the tabloids— a picture of the unfortunate Mrs. Conti. Promptly, Mr. Tack secured the sheets in question and sighed with relief when he found no photograph.

His chief worry was that the old stove might already have been broken up for junk. He took down the telephone directory and plunged into the long list of Shapiros.

It seemed to, him that there were a million of them and that half of the lot were junk dealers or second hand men. Still, with that old horse and cart as a means of transportation, it was unlikely that the headquarters of the Shapiro he sought were very far afield.

Laboriously, Sam copied the addresses of the local and semi-local prospects. He would start out at once and make the rounds of the places on his list.

He must be careful, of course— to do nothing to excite suspicion. Above all, he must not appear anxious to have the stove should he be successful in locating it.

It was a weary morning for Sam. The first Shapiro to whom he paid his respects, presided over a wilderness of broken metal, discarded tires, dirty bottles— scattered about a boarded-in space close to the East River.

Sam inquired for the boss, but was told he was not present and on the plea of searching for odd lengths of lead pipe, Mr. Tack wandered about the premises for a good half hour. It was then he discovered that all of Mr. Shapiro's hauling was done by motor truck,

Which gave Sam an idea. Thenceforth, in approaching another potential benefactor, Sam immediately endeavored to interest the prospect in a new truck. By this method, he soon eliminated such as went in for mechanical transportation.

Nevertheless, the gentleman had visited eleven establishments before the call of hunger guided him into a small eating house not far from Chatham Square and well ta the east. He eased his two hundred and forty pounds into a frail-looking chair and placed an order for goulash, dill pickles, and a cup of coffee.

Over which satisfactory repast the diner won back a certain amount of his wonted pep.

It had been a tough morning. Still, he was shooting for high stakes and he'd be a fool to abandon the chase without further exertion. For which decision, Mr. Tack was devoutly thankful less than an hour later.

Three more Shapiros had been crossed off the list before Sam came to the gloomy alley that ended his quest or, at least, bade fair to do so. Because the first object that met his eyes, as he approached the crazily sagging shop called for by his memorandum, was the familiar express wagon with its cock-eyed inscription!

Sam ran his finger around between collar and neck, moved forward slowly to avoid any appearance of haste and to offset the heavy breathing caused by his recent activities. He assumed a bored and cynical expression as he entered the door and addressed himself to the little rat of a man who sat trying to take the bend out of the spout of a more or less dilapidated coffee percolator.

"You Shapiro?" Sam inquired.

The other answered: " Yazz. Whatchou want?"

"You got any ol' copper? Ol' zinc? Scrap iron, mebbe?"

"Nein." Shapiro flipped the palms of his hands outward. " Ain'dt got it a pound. I clean oudt dis mornin'. Two ton, *velleicht*."

Mr. Tack groaned inwardly, but managed an impassive expression. "I gotta pick up a lot," he said. "Who you sell to?"

With beating heart he awaited the reply. Perhaps this fellow would tell him, perhaps not.

But the other answered, " Feldman. He take all my stuff. He's a jobber by T'irteent' Street an' Eas' River."

"Tank you. I might get what I want offa him." Sam nodded a farewell and escaped as swiftly as decorum permitted.

v

NOW the trail was hot. Visions of sixteen hundred dollars, cash money, floated befo Mr Tacks eyes.

Recklessly he hailed a taxicab, but even at that, excitement caused his breath to come and go with unwonted rapidity as his conveyance drew up before the office of Heyman Feldman, jobber in scrap metals of all kinds. Cash paid for lots of any size.

Sam paid off the taxi driver, and regretted instantly that he had done so. If, perchance, he managed to acquire the stove he sought, he would take no chances by letting it out of his sight. However, he stepped inside with i 's mind made up as to the exact course he meant to pursue with Feldman.

A clerk lounged at a tall desk. To him Sam said briskly, "I'm in the market for coupla ton scrap iron— mebbe t'ree."

The clerk yawned. " Come in to-morrow," he said. "We ain't got a pound now."

"Ain't got a pound!" Sam repeated, as if the statement were utterly astounding. " Why— why— I jus' come from a feller named Shapiro, an' he says he sold you some to-day! Said I could get some here."

"Sure," the other returned languidly. "Sure. We had plenty a coupla hours ago. But it's been shipped. All gone by the barge to Joisey."

"Who d' sell to in Joisey?" Sam inquired, striving to keep down his agitation.

"Curious as hell, ain't ya?" the clerk told him. " What business is it of yours where we sell our goods?"

"Honest, mister," Sam began, aware that he had been too eager. "I didn't mean nothin'. But I gotta hook on to some scrap, an' I thought mebbe the feller you sold to could help me out. That's my reason for asking, mister."

The man relented. "Fat chance you gettin' any stuff there. We sell to the North Atlantic Metals Company, Joisey City. They ain't in the sellin' game. They melt the stuff up."

Sam almost cried in his alarm. Sixteen hundred dollars being fed into the furnaces! But he said, " Thanks, mister. I'll have to go somewheres else.

"I'm in a big hurry." Dashing into the street, he looked wildly about for a taxi. He did not know what he would do in Jersey City. But he knew that Mrs. Conti's bank roll would be given to the flames only over the unconscious form of Sam Tack!

AT the imposing offices of the North Atlantic Metals Company Mr. Tack balked. Through the glass doors he could see important looking men with fifty cent cigars in their teeth, dapper clerks and distracting stenographers.

"I couldn't get away with nothin' with them highbrows," Sam told himself and withdrew a moment to consider.

A few yards along the street great double gates stood open for the entrance or exit of powerful trucks. Gazing down a vista of squat buildings from whose chimneys belched fire and smoke, Mr. Tack could see the yards by the water side, and, even then, two barges unloading their miscellaneous cargoes.

Instantly he determined what he would do. Approaching the burly gateman, he said with summoned deference, "Mind if I go this way? I'm from Feldman's, an' one o' my barges is down there."

"Sure," the man answered amiably. "That's all right." And Sam walked inside.

Almost before he reached the dingy wharf he spied the object of his search! There it stood— Mrs. Conti's stove! No doubt about it! Exactly as Sam had seen it yesterday in the Shapiro wagon!

But now the problem was to obtain possession! To that end the plan which had been forming in Sam's mind as he hurried through the yards, past the yawning foundries, whipped itself into shape. He chuckled at his own resourcefulness!

Carefully seeking out the man who seemed to be in charge, Sam ventured: "Say, mister. Wanta talk t' ya a minute."

The foreman lounged across to Sam's side. The latter pointed to the old stove.

"I'm from Feldman's, see," he began.

The man nodded. Quite possible Sam was from Feldman's.

"What of it?" he asked.

"Well. That stove there—it come in with a lot o' junk yesterday. An' over in our watchman's shanty we got one like it, on'y it's broke. We could git the parts outa this one, see? They ain't makin the model any more, an' so I told the boys to put this one side—to use in fixin' the other, see?"

The man nodded again. Sam's explanation sounded perfectly reasonable.

"What you wanta do?" he inquired.

"I thought I'd ketch it," replied Mr. Tack. "So I hustled over here. TIl pay ya f'r the lost weight an' take the thing back."

The foreman hesitated. "I dunno," he began. " Did ya see 'em in the office?"

"No. Whats the use o' botherin' 'em with a little t'ing like a bum stove? Looky here. I'll make it right with you. Itd cost us ten or fifteen bucks to fix the other stove. An' I'll slip ya five, if you'll dig up a wagon f'r me to cart it away in."

To Sam's horror the boss walked up to the stove.

"What's it made of, anyway?" he asked. " Gold?"

While Sam held his breath the curious one opened the door of the stove and poked about the balled up newspapers within!

Presently the door was closed again, but not before beads of perspiration stood copiously on Sam's forehead. What a chance! But the fellow had suspected nothing! If he had only dug deeply enough! Wow!

"I'm tryin' to be square with you," Sam said. "It's worth fifteen dollars to us, anyhow. Looky here, I'll slip you ten! I'm in a hurry; it's late now."

The man laughed. "All right. Heave over the ten."

Sam did. Fifteen minutes later, perched beside the owner-driver of a one ton truck, Mr. Tack gazed with thumping heart toward the Manhattan ferry slip into which the boat was nosing.

He really was in a terrible state of mind. He had not dared explore the interior of the stove, or give it more than an occasional glance. And, even though the prize was in his clutches, he knew he would worry until it was safely inside his shop— yes, until the cash had been removed and the old stove battered to pieces by his own hands!

By the time they rolled ashore at Chambers Street it was dark. For which Sam gave thanks. Only thirty minutes or so longer, and— hello!

What the hell? Panic arose in the throat of the profit seeker. A burly traffic cop was shouting at the: driver.

"Hey, you! Pull over there!" He indicated the curb. The driver swore softly under his breath and obeyed!

Sam debated whether to cut and run. What a fool he had been not to cover the stove with a tarpaulin or something. He had known that the police were on the lookout for a stove such as this, and this cop had spotted it!

Visions of the station house, of a cell in the Tombs, of a cold-eyed judge, rose quite as vividly as had Mr. Shapiro's equipage registered yesterday morning! Sam broke into a cold sweat as the officer leisurely made his way across to where the truck stood!

Looking up at the driver in the most approved contemptuous manner, the bluecoat inquired; " Who the hell do you think you are, anyhow?"

After the manner of his kind— if they had had been well-trained— the driver answered nothing; just waited. Sam's horrified eyes saw those of the policeman travel to the sorry-looking stove and back again. He waited despairingly for what followed.

The officer said, out of the corner of his mouth, "Youse Joisey guys t'ink you can get away wid murder, don't you?"

Then the driver spoke up.

"What's the row about, officer? What's wrong?"

"What's wrong! Get down outa there an' give a look at y'r number plate. How th' hell y' gonna read it— hangin' by one wire?"

"I didn't know it was loose."

"That's what they all say! I damn good mind ta give ya a ticket. Get down an' fix it! Get a move onl".

The relieved victim scrambled quickly down from his seat. Sam was glad of this. It afforded him an opportunity of collecting his wits.

And presently he found himself in his own establishment, door locked' and shades drawn!

With trembling hands he pulled open the stove door, plunged his fingers among the litter in the fire pot!

Papers! More papers! Cardboard boxes! Ah! Something soft! Sam pulled it out. An old sock— empty! With both hands he scooped out the contents of the receptacle. The stuff ought to be near the bottom, anyway, he surmised.

Little by little the emptying process progressed, until finally the searching fingers of Mr. Tack scratched nothing save fire clay and metal!

He thrust an electric torch into the bowels of Mrs. Conti's stove. Nothing there! Dumfounded, he poured through the mess on the floor! In the end he sat weakly in a chair, staring at his purchase!

"Oy! Oy!" he groaned. "*Versenkt*! *Versenkt*!"

Sam knew the loss of some thirty dollars would not break him. He would get it back all right. Only— only— who in the devil had abstracted the money? He could sleep better if that were explained.

Wild notions of going back over the route on the morrow came to his mind. If he could go down the line, threatening every one with exposure if a split was not forthcoming, he might yet cut in on the profits.

That was his last thought before falling asleep.

vii

HABIT is a strong master. On the day after his Jersey adventure Mr. Tack shook out his morning paper— at quite the usual time. Also, as usual, he perused the classified material first. Then a glance at the news. There it was— on the second page:

FREAK OF FATE AIDED BY HOOCH RETURNS LOST WEALTH

Pair Find Selves Millionaires For Day

Prosperity Proves Fatal

Two men, describing themselves as John Smith and Fred Jones, of no address, were picked up last night in Battery Park after Smith had endeavored to crash the doors of the Aquarium, declaring that he was a sea lion and wanted to go to bed. Evidently the pair had been engaged in long session with Bowery Smoke as the principal recreational element. What puzzled the police was the presence in Jones's pocket of some fifteen hundred dollars in cash.

In view of the disheveled appearance of the men, they were held on an open charge while the latest reports of robberies were scanned. Later, when the prisoners recovered sufficiently to talk with partial coherence, they told a rambling story of having found the money in an old stove which a junk dealer had hired them to remove from a house in First Avenue.

In handling the stove, Smith said, he and Jones had turned it on its side. The door flew open and what appeared to be a mass of newspapers fell out. Jones declared that in replacing these, his hand came in contact with something which turned out to be a roll of bills wound with a rubber band. This he slipped into his pocket and, since the incident, he and Smith had been celebrating their luck.

Upon investigation, the police discovered that this wild story coincided with that told by a Mrs. Anna Conti, who had reported the loss of sixteen hundred dollars through the sale of an old stove in which her husband had hidden the money. The cash was restored, greatly to the relief of its owners.

Sam leaned back in his chair and sighed.

Then, digging into his pockets, he drew out a torn bit of newspaper, scanned it:

FOR SALE— One small second-hand safe. Owner going out of business.

"I wonder," Sam mused, "could I sell it to Mr. Conti."

———————————

15: The Dutch Ghost

T. Jenkins Hains

1866-1953

Popular Magazine Feb 1906

Thornton Jenkins Hains

American sea novelist, who also wrote as Mayn Clew Garnett. He went to sea as a cabin boy in 1878 aged 12, and by 1900 was writing sea stories, including novels. His writing career had wound down by 1930.

WE sat in the shadow of the great mainsail. It was the dog-watch, and the mate who had the stores in charge came out and joined us, stretching himself upon the coamings of the main hatch. Mr. Slade was in no humorous mood, for the crew were unanimous that the stores were bad and that the little they received was worse than the articles called for. They had made "Dutchy," an American-born Teuton, act as spokesman for the delegation of six who had gone aft to interview the skipper in regard to getting a better "whack."

After the "old man" had exhausted all the oaths in his vocabulary, without any visible effect upon the sailor, he had turned the matter over to the mate to settle, and Slade had his work cut out for him.

"You fellers don't know when you have a good thing," said the mate, addressing the watch at large. "What's the good of kicking at grub good as - ourn? We give the best we got, an' there ain't nothing doin' in the after cabin; we will eat alike."

"Well, we don't get no butter, an' we don't get no sugar," said Dutchy.

"There's several things you don't get. forra'ds. But I tell you what you will get," said Slade.

"What?" asked Dutchy, and shockheaded Jones sidled up to hear.

"Well, you'll get your neck broke if you bother me much more— and I'll do the breaking," said the mate.

"Bah! I don't not fear my neck. What do I care about my neck if I no get something to eat?" said Dutchy. "Why not break it now? Die I will, but I not starve— no."

Fear found no place in the hearts of that crew of South Sea traders. We well knew it, and it was no use to bluff them with threats of violence. Slade realized he could not put the crew in irons, for there would be no one to run the little ship. There were only six men forward, two mates aft, and the old man and the Kanaka cook. These were all the hands. Anyhow, Slade, to do him credit, seldom, or, I might say, never, resorted to a brutal fracas in order to establish authority. He was a good mate and knew his business, and his business was to keep the men going in spite of the devil— and bad grub.

We were in mid-ocean, about two thousand miles from any land whatever, and we had to get the vessel home. The little bark had done well, and we all had pretty big shares coming to us. It was this feeling that we were comparatively rich, and starving, which caused the outbreak. All expenses had been cut to a minimum, for the old man was a close trader, and while he had done well he saved every cent he could. The silence was broken by Jones speaking forth.

"Why not die, anyhow, Dutchy? If we die the old man can't run the ship, and if we starve we die, anyway—only suffer more than by going over the side."

"Right, right," commented the Dutchman. "I tink I die, anyways— I yump on de rail overboard— will you die, too, Jonsey?"

Jones scratched his bullet head thoughtfully.

"You go first, Dutch."

"I will do dat; und I vill haunt dis ship," said Dutchy, and he moved away from the vicinity of the mate, as though his presence contaminated him.

Slade apparently thought he had settled the matter. He stretched out on the hatchway and lit his pipe. The other men smoked up and made no further comment, for they were all of one mind, and very sullen. There was a strong suspicion among them that the old man and ourselves, the mates, were getting better "whack" aft— getting an allowance of butter and sugar, the former article consisting of tinned grease which had been shipped in San Francisco about a year previously. Also, we were getting a full allowance of coffee.

To a certain extent their surmises were correct, but it was not for the after guard to enlighten them too carefully. We were getting a little better stuff, for the old man had kept a certain amount of his private stores— which he had paid for himself— for just such an emergency; and he had, of course, invited us

to partake of his bounty. There was hardly enough to serve for all hands. Besides, it was his own property and was not on the ship's bill. The salt beef was good and plenty, also the pork. There was molasses, and there was flour, and there was beans. Coffee the crew had, though it was made out of roasted wheat; but it was good enough; better than many "windjammers" used in long voyages. So we had easy consciences and hoped for the best.

Slade, with all his common sense, was of a deeply superstitious nature. He believed implicitly in "signs." He had spent many hours at night upon a ship's deck and in the tropics where the sounds of the sea are fraught with meaning. The tropic moon cast sharp, moving shadows upon the deck planks while we smoked, and the far-off murmur of. the sea, blending with the tinkle of the sidewash as the vessel plowed along slowly, made the night weird. Sometimes a bos'n bird, frightened from its perch on the royal yard by the flapping of the swaying canvas, would let forth a scream which sounded lonely over the sea.

Dutchy's threat worried Jones a bit, for he spoke forth again.

"I knowed a ship what was haunted by a sailor who died aboard," said he.

"How?" asked the man next him.

"Well, whenever the old man would come on deck something seemed to say: 'Head her sou'west b' west, sou'west b' west.' An' after a while he done it for a whole watch."

"And then what happened?"

"Why, he kept on headin' away, and headin' away until he piled her high an' dry on a coral bank—an' she's there yet."

The tale was not quite convincing, but it had its effect. Slade swore that they were a pack of fools. "Did airy one of you ever see a ghost?" he asked.

All hands swore they had at different times.

"Don't you believe in a hereafter, Mr. Slade?" inquired a sailor very respectfully.

"Of course I do, but what has that to do with it?"

"I dunno," said the sailor meekly; "only it seems that if the soul lives on we might come to some bad through it."

"Well, you fergit it, see!" said the mate sharply, showing he had been more affected than he wished to admit.

The night wore on and the bells struck off. I went below and slept until the mid-watch, when I turned out for the watch from twelve till four.

The moon was high overhead and very bright as I came on deck, and everything spoke of the quiet tropic night, with a steady trade moving us along about five knots.

The voices of the men talking in low tones were distinct to my ears clear aft to the wheel. I peered into the binnacle, as was my custom, to get the course

for certain, besides having the man repeat it to me. Then I walked to the break of the poop and conned the canvas.

The weather maintopsail brace needed setting up a bit, so I called the watch to sway in the slack. This necessitated taking the man off lookout upon the forecastle head, and as he started aft I saw him hesitate a moment. The next instant there was a heavy splash alongside, and he bawled out: "Man overboard!"

It was the old dreaded cry that sounds so sinister in the dead of night, and it needed no repetition. It brought the watch, which had just gone below, scurrying on deck. I sprang to the rail to see if I could glimpse the unfortunate fellow as he came to the surface in the side-wash. A hat looking like the one Dutchy had worn floated past, a dark object showed dimly beneath the sur` face— and that was all. Instantly the ery came from forward:

"It's Dutchy, sir— he's gone overboard."

Slade was on deck and beside me by the time I had the wheel over and the bark slatting up into the breeze. The old man came stumbling up the companionway, bawling for us to get a boat overboard.

Jones let go a circular life-buoy, dropping it into the wake, and then all hands, including the cook, came rushing aft to see if they could do anything.

In a few minutes, which seemed like hours, we had a small boat over the side and four of us were rowing fast astern. The long, heaving swells of the ocean seemed to take on dark shapes again and again, and I, who stood forward, was about to call out several times that I had him, only to find the dark shadows melt again and again into foam. We rowed for a mile or more and found nothing, not even the hat. Then we pulled "slowly back to the ship, all silent and thoughtful, wondering at the audacity of the little fellow who would rather die than suffer inconvenience in his diet.

Slade peered over the rail as we came alongside.

"Did you get him?" he asked.

"No, he's gone," was the answer, and I could see the effort the mate made to hide his feelings.

Some one murmured "Poor devil! " and then the old man ordered us to get the small boat on deck again, which we did, and afterward kept the ship off on her course.

That watch was a long one for me. The whole affair was so sinister and the loss of the man felt so keenly that I lay awake after I had gone below.

The morning dawned. The missing Dutchman was absent from breakfast, and we had to turn the Kanaka cook to, to take his place, for we were so shorthanded it was necessary to have at least three men on watch at a time.

The cook was well hated forward, for he was an instrument of the old man's; so the fact that he must do double duty appealed quite pleasantly to the humor of the men, and even seemed to offset the sorrow caused by their shipmate's death.

Whenever any especially hard duty was called for they held back and insisted that the Kanaka should have first place, as befitted so important a personage as a cook.

Joe did not appear to relish this honor, but he was one against all hands and he did the extra work in spite of his grumbling. With the labor about decks and cooking he grew quite thin and disgusted, and the more he grumbled the better the men liked it.

"For, you see," said a sailor, "he could easy get us some of the after 'whack' if he would only steal it. I got no use for a nigger who won't steal when he gets a chance— it ain't natural."

For a few nights after the loss of our man affairs went along as usual except that I noticed that Slade was very cross and nervous after midnight.

We attributed this to the warm weather and work of getting the ship in prime condition, for it is on the homeward run that a vessel fits up handsomely, painting and scraping and doing things that are befitting a yacht, so that by the time she runs into the variables and out of good weather she. is looking fine and fit to enter her home port as an example of her master's seamanship.

I noticed that the grumbling forward had stopped, and that while Joe had grown thinner daily the others seemed actually to wax fatter at once. The provisions were the same, apparently, but the men ate with relish and worked hard.

"I don't know what the trouble is, said Slade to me on the fifth night, "but there is something wrong aboard this ship."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, it's like this. Every time I go on watch I see that Dutchman go over the side. Last night Jones was on the forecastle head and I saw the Dutchman jump over the rail as plainly as I see you now. I asked Jones if he saw anything, but he said no. There is something wrong— but don't, for Heaven's sake, let the men know I think so."

The next morning the old man came to breakfast as usual, but failed to speak to Slade as he sat down. I could see him through the cabin skylight, and he looked sour.

"You seem to eat a lot for a thin man," said the captain, after a long silence.

"What's the matter, sir?" asked Slade.

"Oh, nothing, but I seen hogs eat afore— but never seen one to beat you."

The mate looked hard at him. Then he wiped his mouth on the back of his hand and reached for his cap.

"Goin' on deck?" asked the skipper sourly.

"I am, sir," said Slade.

"Come here a minute," said the old man.

The mate came slowly toward him. When he reached a distance of about half a fathom he stopped, and the old man looked quizzically at his pockets. Then he suddenly reached out and felt the mate's coat, running his hand all over him.

"May I ask you what this is for, sir?" said Slade respectfully.

"No, you mayn't," snapped the skipper, and he resumed his breakfast.

Slade looked worried, but came on deck without another word. The next meal we had no coffee, no sugar, no butter— only dry ship's bread, like the men had forward, and roasted wheat juice to wash down the salt junk.

"Mr. Slade," said the old man as he came on deck that morning, "you will | kindly hand over the keys of the storeroom to me. I will look out for the stores hereafter."

The mate handed the keys over without comment. The man at the wheel seemed to be straining his eyes at the lubber's mark in the binnacle, but had a vague and somewhat satisfied: look pass over his face while doing so. He was wearing some of Dutchy's clothes which had been divided among his watch after the custom aboard ship at the death of a messmate.

"What do you think of the old man?" asked the mate when the affair was settled.

"Seems to be a bit ugly about something," I answered.

"Do you think he believes I steal his grub?"

"Well, it does look sort of queer, don't it?" I answered.

That day it was calm and we rigged a staging over the side to paint her to the water-line, for the bark was pretty well set up everywhere, and the salt streaks on her planking showed gray and sea-washed, making altogether an old-looking vessel out of a comparatively new ship. The black. side paint, with the newly tarred lanyards above ` it, and the fresh tarred hemp shrouds, would make her as fit as a yacht.

She was of the old type, with hemp rigging, steel not having come into vogue at that date, but we took some pride in her, for all that, and all hands ` were apparently anxious that she should look well, feeling the interest that all good seamen feel in their ship that has been their home for a year or more.

I had big Jake with me, and also Jones at the further end of the staging.

We lowered away until our feet were more than ankle deep in the sea when the bark rolled toward us, and we slathered on the paint in fine style, intending to get the whole side done while the calm lasted.

Suddenly Jake stopped work and gazed down into the depths. I followed the direction of his gaze and saw a shadow deep down in the clear sea.

"It's a shark," said he, "and he's been following us ever since Dutchy went over. It means that there's another one to go— he wouldn't follow if he wasn't sure of it."

Jones smiled a little sheepishly and scratched his bullet head.

"One gone is enough," said he; "it makes too much work for the rest, and I won't stand for it— no, sir, I won't stand for it."

"Well, I'm tired of work—and I'm thinking of goin' where Dutchy went," said Jake.

At the same time I noticed he drew his feet up— for we had done so already— not feeling that the occasion called for a test of the brute's hunger. The shark rose slowly to a depth of about a fathom beneath the surface, and then stopped and looked up at us out of a little steady eye.

"Dutchy is in him," commented Jake, squirting a stream of tobacco juige at the fish, "and he's well off. Pm tired of slaving, an' workin', an' workin', an' eatin' nothing but salt beef— without no butter— or no sugar.. What's the use, anyway?"

"You'll live on like a man," said Jones, "an' you won't start any, foolishness. I'll tell Sam an' Pete and we'll see about it."

"You take your brush and get to work," I commented. 'You're as fat as butter, and healthy, and what more do you want? Were having good weather and making good time across, and-your share of the trading is over a thousand dollars. Think of the fun you'll have when you hit the town: a good steady drunk for a couple of months with all the pretty girls of 'Frisco to choose from. What's the matter with you, anyway?"

Jake obeyed sullenly, and remained quiet all the watch. When Slade came on deck we reported the shark.

"It's a bad sign," said the mate, nervously, "its a bad sign. Catch him? Would you catch him? Not for a farm would I touch a line to that fellow, and I won't stand to see anyone else do it, either. No, sir, let the Dutchman be. He's all right where he is.'

When I had a chance I took a half pound of chloride of mercury, the kind used aboard vessels to cover certain metal work, and splitting a chunk of salt pork, placed the chloride within the gash. I waited until the shark came close alongside, then dropped the bait overboard. In less than two seconds the brute had swallowed it.

"Now," I said, "the fellow won't follow us very far, and even if he does he won't be able to bite very hard, for, if I know anything about medicine, his teeth will be loose in his head before long, and he'll be what is called salivated."

Day after day passed and nothing happened to disturb the serenity of the voyage. Jake never made good his threat of suicide, for the men forward dissuaded him. Especially did Jones hold forth against it, as Joe the Kanaka cook was in his watch and the colored man was not doing all that should be expected from an able seaman.

One night Slade came to me.

"I don't want to appear like a fool," said he, "but the fact is I have seen that Dutchman's ghost twice since you killed that shark. I wish you hadn't done it. Twice I saw the fellow come up from somewhere— the hatches are all closed and sealed— and go over the side like he did the night he was lost."

"Imagination," I protested. "You've a soft spot for the poor fellow, and it does you credit, Slade, but you've seen nothing. Better have a drink when you" go below."

"I've been thinking that drink is just the trouble. Feel my pulse."

I felt it, and a steadier throb never jumped through a seaman's arm.

"It's no use to fool with that nonsense," I said.

"Well, the old man-is going to put into Honolulu. Says he has got to get something decent to eat if he loses the ship for it, and all the time he has those stores aft in the lazaretto, saving them for something."

"Is he really going in there?" I asked.

"Yes, he said. so to-day— the course is nor'-nor'east; that's straight for Pearl Harbor. We ain't more than two hundred miles away now."

"Well, I for one won't be sorry to get ashore for a few days," I answered.

"Poor Dutchy, he had a sweetheart there, Hulalo they called her, and a right smart girl she was, too."

"Yes, big Jake took a fancy to her himself the last voyage. I suppose he will fill the Dutchman's place all right, although those girls are mighty faithful to those fellows who have been good to them."

We had been down to salt junk for more than a week now, and the prospect of getting ashore again was pleasant. It would not do to tell the men, but somehow they found it out the day before we made harbor. To deny them all shore leave would invite mutiny, so when we dropped the hook they all came aft in a body, and asked permission to go ashore for a day and a night.

Slade drew lots, and Jones and the Kanaka cook were to remain aboard with the after guard. The rest went off in one of the many boats which always come out to a newly arrived ship.

The next day, about an hour after sundown, the liberty men came drifting back. Some had traces of debauch written plainly upon their faces, but big Jake came in a small canoe with the girl, Hulalo, and he was clean-shaved and handsome.

In another canoe the girl's father and mother paddled, while following them came a score of fruit boats, laden with delicacies, which make a sailor's mouth water after a long siege of salt junk. A lantern burned at the gangway, and shed a fitful light upon the main deck.

The heat was intense, and Slade had the covers of the fore hatch removed, to let in air below.

There was no moon now, and Jake took his sweetheart to the forecastle head to whisper the old, old story. The old man sat aft and smoked a villainous cigar, while Slade and I loafed about the poop, buying a bunch of fruit now and then from the bumboat men and women.

While we loafed about we became aware of a noisy fracas forward. Then a woman's scream smote the air. This was followed by the hoarse oaths of big Jake, coupled with the guttural grunts of a Dutchman.

Making our way to the forecastle head we saw a splendid bout taking place between two men. Jake swung first right and left at a short man's head, and the stocky little fellow bored in through the strokes, and punched with a vigor born of good nutrition and plenty of rest. It was Dutchy. There was no mistake. He was making the fight of his life.

A ring of dusky men and women formed about the contestants and the men of the crew. Slade was there, gazing in amazement; but a particularly good pass from the stocky little man called forth his enthusiasm.

"Go in, you damned ghost!" he yelled. "Hit him in the wind."

"I hit where I tink best," yelled the ghost in return; and he upper-cut the big sailor painfully.

"Soak him good an' plenty," yelled Jones to Jake; "he's had a cinch for a month, and needs some work."

"Yes, kill him; kill him for me," yelled the cook, "Kill him, Mr. Jake, an' I never forget it. He make me do his work— I'll fix him after you get done, an' I sure kill him if you don't"

"I 'tend to you next— you—" cried the ghost, but he was cut short by a swing which landed upon his hard head and jolted him severely.

It was all over the deck. Up and down they strove, hitting and punching, swinging, and even butting their heads together in the clinches.

No one seemed to have an idea of stopping the row. It appealed to all natures alike.

But Jake was powerful, and the work he had done put him to an advantage. The ghost was puffing and blowing. Jake took his head under his arm and proceeded to hammer him at will.

"You no kill my dear Dutch," screamed Hulalo, forcing her way through the press. "You no can kill my dear man."

She flung herself upon the sailors and protected the Dutchman's head from further injury. Then we came to our senses, and stepped in to separate them.

Fifteen minutes later, when the signs of the fracas were obliterated, we marched the ghost aft to interview the old man.

"He took my dear girl, my love," sniffled Dutchy, as we came into the august presence.

"Took your what?" roared the skipper.

"He took my love away from me— my Hulalo— I marry her some day— when my *vrow* dies— did Yake; he take her, he try to take her from me."

"You scoundrel! I thought you were dead," bawled the skipper.

"No, I not dead— I cannot stand that— I would stayed dead but for dat. I no stand seein' my Hulalo sittin' in dat Yake's lap. No, I not dead py von dam sight. *Nein*."

"Well, what did you do with my stores? What did you make believe you were lost for, you thief? I'll put you in irons for your behavior," said the old man, red in the face.

"I care not von leedle dam for your irons—an' you know ut. I ate de good 'whack,' und I give it to de men—dey all vas in de game wid me. Dat Yake was de leader mit it. He wanted to get me oudt de way so he take my Hulalo. I pay you for de grub— what is left is in de forepeak— I hid ut dere. Dat Yake he want to die, too, to get avay from de work. Jonsey he no let him die. He mad because he no die, too, an' shirk de work. I pay you ut all pack— but dat Yake he not take my Hulalo. *Nein*."

The skipper looked at the man and swore in many fluent ways. Then he thought of his account-book, the shares of the men in the trading. Dutchy had a great deal of money due him. It would be well to add fifty per cent discount for the trouble he had caused.

"You can take him forward, Mr. Slade," he said.

In the deepening gloom of the tropic evening two figures were seen sitting upon the forecastle rail, and. one of them had a short, stout arm about the other's waist, while a flow of broken English, Dutch and Kanaka floated over the water. An old man and an old woman sat in their bumboat holding on to

the fore channels long after the other boats had gone ashore, and they waited patiently for their daughter.

I met Slade under the break of the poop.

"Hows your pulse?" I asked softly.

He made a vicious pass at me with a pineapple, but missed, the fruit smashing against the rail. Then he smiled.

"Come below; it's on me, and it's good rum this time— but keep your head shut or there'll be murder aboard before we get to 'Frisco."

16: The Disillusioned

J. H. M. Abbott

1874-1953

The Australian Woman's Mirror, 22 Dec 1925

John Henry Macartney Abbott

Australian journalist, poet and author, and veteran of the Boer War

"WHAT I really object to," observed Major Curran to his brother Paddy, as they walked up and down the broad terrace that fronts the homestead at Cedar Creek— "what I cannot stomach, my dear Pat, is that she should have gone off with a man who'll bore her into homicidal mania before she's lived with him for three months. Of course, if I should come across Dr. Teignmouth, no doubt but what I should horsewhip him, or break his jaw, or something— but, inwardly, I'd be very sorry for the fellow, since he'd have been putting up with Helen's temper well and truly developed and sustained by his gifted boresomeness— ever since they went away together.

"Yes," he continued, "what hurts me in this affair— hurts, you understand, my personal vanity— is that she should have abandoned a really cultured and erudite engineer, like myself, to cast in her lot with that hypochondriacal sawbones and pill-compounder, who thinks he's the discoverer of the human body. It is very galling, very galling, indeed."

"Was ye fond of her, Johnny, me bhoy?" asked his brother, a little absently as his eyes wandered over the beautiful valley of Cedar Creek and rested on the long blue rampart of the Saddleback Mountain opposite. "D'ye think ye'll miss her? She's a very handsome woman— there's no doubt about that."

"Miss her? Of course I shall. We may not have hit it off altogether, at times— in fact, most of the time— but if you were used to looking at a clock on the wall of your study every day and every night, and some fellow purloined it— well, you'd miss that, wouldn't you? Of course you would. Or a particular

easy-chair in your house, or a picture— or anything? I assure you I anticipate missing Helen dreadfully."

"Faith, then, I think, meself, I'd be after regarding it as a blessed deliv'rince. So I would."

Major Curran turned upon his brother angrily. "I wonder, Patrick, you have the infernal impudence to be standing there and talking the like o' that about my wife! I do, indeed."

"Well, then, John, I should ha' thought she'd put herself out o' court entirely by what she's been after doin' to ye. Does a woman expect to run away with another man an' not be talked about? 'Tis th' quare place, this Botany Bay settlement, but I'd be thinkin' it'd not be altogether toleratin' that sort o' high jinks without commentin' on it. However, ye've got me up from Sydney— an' a devil of a rough passage I had, too, in that same Green Hills packet— an' I'd like to know what 'tis ye want me to do. Sure, I've no wish for to discuss your immaculate spouse with you. 'Twas you started it, ye might bear in mind."

Captain Patrick Curran, master of the convict transport *Artemis*, at present lying in Port Jackson while she slowly loaded her cargo of hides and tallow for the homeward voyage, regarded with some degree of peevishness his brother John, sometime retired from His Majesty's Royal Regiment of Engineers and now settled near the junction of the Williams and Hunter Rivers. Never, he reflected, since John was a big boy and himself a little whipper-snapper in a holland blouse and a peaked cap, before he went to sea, had he been able to comprehend the working of his elder brother's mind. He said a thing to you one minute which, if for the sake of peace and quietness you agreed with you might find to be, in some amazing fashion, wholly the contrary to the views he really held. If you disagreed with it m the first instance you were an oaf and an ass, quite incapable of exercising the faculty of reason. What was a man to do with such a fellow?

He took out his pipe and proceeded to cut himself a fill of tobacco from a fragment of black negro-head. The best thing was to say nothing at all, merely to do what his brother required of him without criticism, in the sure and certain anticipation of doing it to his dissatisfaction.

"Read that letter, Patrick. 'Twill enlighten you as to the depravity of the female mind." His brother handed him a folded sheet of notepaper, from which emanated a faint and subtle perfume of violets.

The sailor took the letter and opened it out, studying its angular caligraphy with knitted brow, his empty pipe in his mouth, and knife and tobacco in either clenched fist as he gripped the sides of the sheet 'twixt thumbs and

forefingers. He read it aloud, slowly, with a sort of inflection of awe in his pleasant voice:

Royal Hotel, Sydney,
March 5th, 1836.
John,

I do not care whether you build your suspension-bridge across the river, discover the secret of perpetual motion, or invent a carriage to go without horses. I am quite tired of listening to your ceaseless babble of entirely uninteresting affairs. I have written to Surgeon Teignmouth, who is at present at Hobart Town with his ship, to come and take me away. I know that he will do so. Of course, I shall be considered a bad woman by the world—but I am not so. I am merely a bored woman.

Helen Curran.

"Did you ever hear of such casualness in your born days?" remarked the elder Curran when his brother silently handed him back this brief epistle.

" 'Tis like Helen. Ye've med her desprit. Sure, ye must ha' talked the head off of this unfortunate girl. What d'ye call it in y'r engineering jargon? The breaking-strain— ah, yes, the breaking-strain. That's what she's come to. Livin' in th' woilds here, too, wid you an' th' bridge of ropes an' th' steam shandrydan an' iverlastin' movemint. Heaven bless us, 'tis a wonder she did not poison ye!"

The Major turned upon him wrathfully, as his brother had intended he should do.

"You forget yourself, Patrick. You're my guest here, and related to me by ties of blood, else, by heaven, I'd punch your head for you. How dare you sneer at the scientific problems which occupy my attention— matters which you are quite incapable of considering philosophically."

"Dare, is it? You mane not quite mad enough for. But listen to me now, Johnny-me-bhoy. Restrain y'silf an' take the advice of an expayrienced person. Th' *Shamrock*— th' confounded bug-ridden packet— sails back to Sydney to-morrow morning. I'll go down in her, and go see Helen. Mebbe I can rayson wid her. And I'll go see Dr.Teignmouth when His Majesty's ship *Polestar* arrives in Port Jackson. She's on her way up from th' Derwent now. I heard it before I left Sydney. She'll be making a slow passage on account o' th' nor'-east winds that do prevail at th' prisint sayson.... Ye might ask me have I a mouth on me, so ye might. Here have I been a good hour's time, an' not a drop of y'r whisky has passed into me main-hatch. 'Tis not Irish, John, for to neglect a guest. An' a brother. An' a Christian. 'Tis not Irish."

ON A BLUE and balmy afternoon before the cool north-easterly breeze, H.M.S. *Polestar*, 26 guns, Captain the Hon. Wilfrid Lawn, rounded Bradley's Head and stood up the harbor to her moorings in Farm Cove. From the poop of the *Artemis*, anchored at the mouth of Sydney Cove, Mr. Patrick Curran, her popular commander (as the *Sydney Gazette* entitled him), followed her progress to Pinchgut through the cedar-cased telescope presented to him as a mark of esteem by Mr. William Nash, the celebrated convict. As her yards came round and her sails began to furl in smartest Navy fashion, Mr. Curran descended the side-ladder to his waiting gig and prepared to board the King's ship.

Under the north-eastern bastion of Fort Macquarie Mrs. John Curran expectantly awaited the coming of the first boat ashore from the man-o'-war.

Having saluted the quarter-deck, Patrick Curran requested the officer of the watch to send below for Dr. Teignmouth. In five minutes the portly, middle-aged surgeon, magnificently attired in shore-going raiment and holding his beaver top-hat in his hand, bowed to the master of the *Artemis*, and begged to know in what manner he might be of service to him.

"Sir," said Patrick, in a melancholy voice and with a moist eye, "I am the bearer of bad tidings. The late Mrs. John Curran—"

The surgeon started, paled, and gazed at the merchant skipper with apprehension. "The late Mrs. Curran?"

Solemnly his visitor bowed his head and permitted a tear to defile the frigate's spotless decks.

"Suddenly, sir— this morning— quite suddenly. She was a friend of yours. Best to hear it from another friend. The Sandhills burial-ground at ten o'clock to-morrow morning. Good afternoon, sir."

He bowed to the astounded surgeon, turned on his heel and was in his boat before Dr. Teignmouth had recovered from the shock.

Directing his coxswain to land him on the strip of beach below the Fort, Mr. Patrick Curran presently appeared before his brother's wife beneath the sandstone walls of Governor Macquarie's citadel.

"My poor Helen," he said feelingly. "My poor, dear girl. I know all. A scoundrel. A very great scoundrel. You have had a fortunate escape, so ye have, now."

Mrs. Curran looked at him with wide and anxious eyes. He shook his head mournfully.

"What is it, Patrick?" the pretty woman whispered, with fear in her husky voice.

Again he shook his head.

"Some of my sex, Helen, are entoirely bereft of common daicency. 'Tis but this moment I have spoken wid Dr. Teignmouth. I must put it bluntly, I fear. He regards you, my poor girl, simply as an episode of the past."

"Oh, Patrick!"

"Will ye take me advoice, me dear creature, and return wid me this night to Cedar Creek? The packet sails at nine o'clock."

Weeping gently, Mrs. John Curran nodded her head with resignation. They walked along the Cove arm in arm. As he parted from her at the front door of the Royal Hotel in George-street, Mr. Patrick Curran murmured to himself with much satisfaction:

"Sure, honesty's th' best policy. 'Tis glad I am I've tould no lies to ayther of 'em. 'Tis glad I am, indade."

17: The Mayor's Dovecote

A. T. Quiller-Couch

1863-1944

Metropolitan Magazine June 1908

Cassell's Winter Annual 1924

Arthur Thomas Quiller-Couch

IN the first quarter of the nineteenth century there lived at Dolphin House, Troy, a Mr. Samuel Pinsent, ship chandler, who by general consent was the funniest fellow that ever took up his abode in the town. He came originally from somewhere in the South Hams, but this tells us nothing, for the folk of the South Hams are a decent, quiet lot, and you might travel the district to-day from end to end without coming across the like of Mr. Pinsent.

He was, in fact, an original. He could do nothing like an ordinary man, and he did everything jocosely, with a wink and a chuckle. To watch him, you might suppose that business was a first-class practical joke, and he invariably wound up a hard bargain by slapping his victim on the back. Some called him Funny Pinsent, others The Bester. Few liked him. Nevertheless he prospered, and in 1827 was chosen mayor of the borough.

In person Mr. Pinsent was spare and diminutive, with a bald head, a tuft of badger-grey hair over either ear, and a fresh-coloured clean-shaven face, extraordinarily wrinkled about the mouth and at the comers of the eyes, which twinkled at you from under a pair of restless stivvery eyebrows. You had only to look at them and note the twitch of his lips to be warned of the man's facetiousness.

Mr. Pinsent's office— for he had no shop-front, and indeed his stock-in-trade was not of a quality to invite inspection— looked out upon the Town Square; his back premises upon the harbour, across a patch of garden terminated by a low wall and a blue-painted quay door. I call it a garden because Mr. Pinsent called it so; and, to be sure, it boasted a stretch of turf, a

couple of flower-beds, a flagstaff, and a small lean-to greenhouse. But casks and cods of manila rope, blocks, pumps and chain-cables encroached upon the amenities of the spot— its pebbled pathway, its parterres, its raised platform overgrown with nasturtiums where Mr, Pinsent sat and smoked of an evening and watched the shipping; the greenhouse stored sacks of ship-bread as well as pot plants; and Mrs. Salt, his housekeeper (he was unmarried), had attached a line to the flagstaff and aired the washing thereon.

But the pride of the garden was its dovecote, formed of a large cider barrel on a mast. The barrel was pierced with pigeon-holes and fitted with ledges on which the birds stood to preen themselves. Mr. Pinsent did not profess himself a fancier. His columbarium— a mixed collection of fantails and rocksters— had come to him by a side-wind of business, as offset against a bad debt; but it pleased him to sit on his terrace and watch the pretty creatures as they wheeled in flight over the harbour and among the masts of the shipping. They cost him nothing to keep, for he had always plenty of condemned peas on hand, and they multiplied in peace at the top of their mast, which was too smooth for any cat to climb.

One summer's night, however, about midway in the term of his mayoralty, Mr. Pinsent was awakened from slumber by a strange sound of fluttering. It came through the open window from the garden, and almost as he sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes it warned him that something serious was amiss with his dovecote. He flung off the bedclothes and made a leap for the window.

The night was warm and windless, with a waning moon in the east, and as yet no tremble of the dawn below it. Around the foot of the dovecote the turf lay in blackest shadow ; but a moon-ray, over-topping the low ridge of Mr. Garraway's back premises (Mr. Pinsent's next-door neighbour on the left), illuminated the eastern side of the barrel, the projecting platform on which it rested, and a yard or more of the mast, from its summit down— or, to be accurate, it shed a pale radiance on a youthful figure clinging there by its legs, and upon a hand and arm reaching over the platform to rob the roost.

"You infernal young thief!" shouted Mr. Pinsent.

As his voice broke upon the night across the silent garden the hand paused suddenly in the act of dragging forth a pigeon which it had gripped by the neck. The bird, almost as suddenly set free, flapped across the platform, found its wings and scuffled away in flight. The thief— Mr. Pinsent had been unable to detect his features— slid down the mast into darkness. And the darkness, a moment later, became populous with whispering voices and the sound of feet stealing away towards the yet deeper shadow of Mr. Garraway's wall.

"Who goes there!" challenged Mr. Pinsent again. "Villains! Robbers ! You just wait till I come down to you! I've a gun here, by George I and if you don't stand still there and give me your names—"

But this was an empty threat. Mr. Pinsent, though nothing of a sportsman, did indeed possess a gun, deposited with him years ago as security against a small loan. But it hung over the office chimney-piece downstairs, and he could not have loaded it even if given the necessary powder and shot. Possibly the boys guessed this. At any rate they made no answer.

Possibly, too— for a white nightcap and nightshirt were discernible in almost pitchy darkness— they saw him strut back from the window to slip downstairs and surprise them. Mr. Pinsent paused only to insert his feet into a pair of loose slippers, and again, as he unbolted the back door, to snatch a lantern off its hook. Yet by the time he ran out upon the garden the depredators had made good their escape.

He groped inside the lantern for the tinder-box which lay within, handy for emergencies ; found it, and kneeling on the grass plot beside the mast struck flint upon steel. As he blew upon the tinder and the faint glow lit up his face and nightcap, a timorous exclamation quavered down from one of the upper windows.

"Oh, sir! Wha— whatever is the matter?" It was the voice of Mrs. Salt, the housekeeper.

For a moment Mr. Pinsent did not answer. In the act of thrusting the brimstone match into the lantern his eye had fallen on a white object lying on the turf and scarcely a yard away— a white fantail pigeon, dead, with a twisted neck. He picked up the bird and stared around angrily into the darkness.

"Robbery is the matter, ma'am!" he announced, speaking up to the unseen figure in the window. Some young ruffians have been stealing and lolling my pigeons. I caught 'em in the act, and a serious matter they'll find it. Here Mr. Pinsent raised his voice, in case any of the criminals should be lurking within earshot. "I doubt, ma am, a case like this will have to go to assizes."

"Hadn't you better put something on?" suggested another voice, not Mrs. Salt's, from somewhere on the left.

"Eh?" Mr. Pinsent wheeled about and peered into the darkness. "Is that you, Garraway?"

"It is," answered Mr. Garraway from his bedroom window over the wall. " Been stealin' your pigeons, have they? Well, I'm sorry; and yet in a way 'tis a relief to my mind. For, first along, seeing you out there skipping round in your shirt with a lantern, I'd a fear you had been taken funny in the night!"

"Bless the man!" said Mr. Pinsent. "Do you suppose I'd do this for a joke?"

"I don't know," responded Mr. Garraway with guarded candour. "I feared it. But, of course, if they've stolen your pigeons, 'tis another matter. A very serious matter, as you say, and no doubt your being mayor makin' it all the worse."

Now this attitude of Mr. Garraway conveyed a hint of warning, had Mr. Pinsent been able to seize it. The inhabitants of Troy have, in fact, a sense of humour, but it does not include facetiousness. On the contrary, facetiousness affronts and pains them. They do not understand it, and Mr. Pinsent understood nothing else. Could he have been told that for close upon twenty years he had been afflicting his neighbours with the pleasantries he found so enjoyable, his answer had undoubtedly been; "The bigger numbskulls they!" But now his doom was upon him.

He ate his breakfast that morning in silence. Mrs. Salt, burning to discuss the robbery, set down the dishes with a quite unnecessary clatter, but in vain. He scarcely raise his head.

"Indeed, sir, and I've never known you so upset," she broke out at length, unable to contain herself longer. "Which I've always said that you was wonderful, the way you saw the bright side of everything and could pass it off with a laugh."

"Good lord!" said Mr. Pinsent testily. "Did I ever call midnight robbery a laughing matter?"

"No-o," answered Mrs. Salt, yet as one not altogether sure. "And I dare say your bein' mayor makes you take a serious view."

Breakfast over, the mayor took hat and walking-stick for his customary morning stroll along the street to Butcher Trengove's to choose the joint for his dinner and pick up the town's earliest gossip. It is Troy's briskest hour; when the dairy carts, rattling homeward, meet the country folk from up the river who have just landed at the quays and begun to sell, from door to door, their poultry and fresh eggs, vegetables, fruit and nosegays of garden flowers; when the tradesmen, having taken down their shutters, stand in the roadway; admire the effect of their shop- windows and admonish the apprentices cleaning the panes; when the children loiter and play at hop-scotch on their way to school, and the housewives, having packed them off, find time for a neighbourly clack over the scouring of doorsteps.

It might be the mayor's fancy and no more, but it certainly appeared to him that the children smiled with a touch of mockery as they met him and saluted. For aught he knew, any one of these grinning imps— confound 'em!— might be implicated in the plot. The townsmen gave him good morning as usual, and yet not quite as usual. He felt that news of the raid had won abroad ; that, although shy of speaking, they were studying his face for a sign. He kept it

carefully cheerful, but came near to losing his temper when he reached Trengove's shop to find Mr. Garraway already there and in earnest conversation with the butcher.

"Ah, good mornin' again! I was just talkin' about you and your pigeons," said Mr. Garraway frankly.

"Good morning, Y'r Worship!" echoed Butcher Trengove. "And what can I do for Y'r Worship this fine morning? I was just allowin' to Mr. Garraway here that, seein' the young dare-devils had left you a bird with their compliments, maybe you'd fancy a nice cut of rump steak to fill out a pie."

"This isn't exactly a laughing matter, Mr. Trengove."

"No, no, to be sure!" Butcher Trengove composed his broad smile apologetically. But, after a moment, observing Mr. Pinsent's face and that (at what cost he guessed not) it kept its humorous twist, he let his features relax. "I was allowin', though, that if any man could get even with a bit of fun it would be Y'r Worship."

"Oh, never fear but I'll get even with 'em," promised His Worship, affecting an easiness he did not feel.

"Monstrous, though! Monstrous!" pursued the butcher. "The boys of this town be gettin' past all control. Proper young limbs, I call some of 'em."

"And there's the fellow that's to blame," put in Mr. Garraway, with a nod at a little man hurrying past the shop, on the opposite pavement. This was Mr. Lupus, the schoolmaster, on his way to open school.

"Hi, Mr. Lupus!"

Mr. Lupus gave a start, came to a halt, and turned on the shop door a pair of mildly curious eyes guarded by moon-shaped spectacles. Mr. Lupus lived with an elderly sister who kept a bakehouse beside the Ferry Landing, and there in extra-scholastic hours he earned a little money by writing letters for seamen. His love-letters had quite a reputation, and he penned them in a beautiful hand, with flourishes around the capital letters; but in Troy he passed for a person of small account.

"I— I beg your pardon, gentlemen! Were you calling to me?" stammered Mr. Lupus.

"Good morning, Lupus!" The mayor nodded to him. "We were just saying that you bring up the boys of this town shamefully. Yes, sir, shamefully."

"No, indeed. Your Worship," protested Mr. Lupus, looking up with a timid smile as he drew off his spectacles and polished them. "Your Worship is pleasant with me. I do assure you, gentlemen, that my boys are very good boys, and give me scarcely any trouble."

"That's because you sit at school in your day-dreams, and don't take note of the mischief that goes on around you. A set of anointed young scoundrels, Lupus!"

"You don't mean it, sir. Oh, to be sure you don't mean it! Your Worship's funny way of putting things is well known, if I may say so. But they are good boys, on the whole— very good boys; and you should see the regularity with which they attend. I sometimes wish— meaning no offence— that you gentlemen of position in the town would drop in upon us a little oftener. It would give you a better idea of us, indeed it would. For my boys are very good boys, and for regularity in attendance we will challenge any school in Cornwall, sir, if you will forgive my boasting."

Now this suggestion of Mr. Lupus, though delicately put, and in a nervous flutter, ought by rights to have hit the mayor and Mr. Garraway hard, the pair of them being trustees of the charity under which the Free Grammar School was administered. But in those days few public men gave a thought to education, and Mr. Lupus taught school, year in and year out, obedient to his own conscience, his own enthusiasms, unencouraged by visitation or word of advice from his governors.

The mayor, to be sure, flushed red for a moment, but Mr. Garraway's withers were unwrung.

"That don't excuse their committing burglary and stealing His Worship's pigeons," said he. Briefly he told what had happened.

Mr. Lupus adjusted and re-adjusted his spectacles, still in a nervous flurry. "You surprise me, gentlemen. It is unlike my boys— unlike all that I have ever believed of them. You will excuse me, but if this be true I shall take it much to heart. So regular in attendance and stealing pigeons, you say? Oh, be sure, sirs, I will give them a talking to— a severe talking to— this very morning."

The little schoolmaster went his way down the street in a flutter. The mayor stared after him abstractedly.

"That man," said he, after a long pause, "ought to employ some one to use his cane for him."

With this, for no apparent reason, his eye brightened suddenly. But the source of his inspiration he kept to himself. His manner was jocular as ever as he ordered his steak.

On his way home he knocked at the door of the town sergeant, Thomas Trebilcock, a septuagenarian, more commonly known as Pretty Tommy. The town sergeant was out in the country picking mushrooms, but his youngest granddaughter, who opened the door, promised to send him along to the mayor's office as soon as ever he returned.

At ten o'clock, or a little later. Pretty Tommy presented himself, and found Mr. Pinsent at his desk engaged in complacent study of a sheet of manuscript, to which he had just attached his signature.

"I think this will do," said Mr. Pinsent with a twinkle, and he recited the composition aloud.

Pretty Tommy, having adjusted his horn spectacles, took the paper and read it through laboriously.

''You want me to cry it through the town?"

"Certainly. You can fetch your bell, and go along with it at once."

"Your Worship knows best, o' course." Pretty Tommy appeared to hesitate.

"Why, what's wrong with it ? "

"Nothin'," said Tommy, after a slow pause and another perusal, "only 'tis unusual— unusual, and funny at the same time; an' that's always a risk." He paused again for a moment, and his face brightened. "But there," he said, " 'tis a risk you're accustomed to by this time!"

Half an hour later the sound of the town sergeant's bell at the end of the street called tradesmen from their benches and housewives from their kitchens to hear the following proclamation, to which Tommy had done honour by donning his official robe (of blue, gold-laced, with a scarlet pelisse) and cocked hat. A majestic figure he made, too, standing in the middle of the roadway with spectacles on nose, and the great hand-bell tucked under his arm:

"O YES! O YES! O YES!

"Take you all notice: that whereas some evil-disposed boys did last night break into the premises of Samuel Pinsent, Worshipful Mayor of this Borough, and did rob His Worship of several valuable pigeons; His Worship hereby offers a reward of Five Shillings to the parent or parents of any such boy as will hand him over, that the Mayor may have ten minutes with him in private. Amen.

GOD SAVE THE KING!"

Mr. Pinsent, seated in his office, heard the bell sounding far up the street, and chuckled to himself. He chuckled again, peering through his wire blinds when Pretty Tommy emerged upon the square outside and took his stand in the middle of it to read the proclamation. It collected no crowd, but it drew many faces to the windows and doorways, and Mr. Pinsent observed that one and all broke into grins as they took the humour of his offer.

He rubbed his hands together. He had been angry, to begin with; yes— he would confess it— very angry. But he had overcome it and risen to his

reputation. The town had been mistaken in thinking it could put fun on him. It was tit-for-tat again, and the laugh still with Samuel Pinsent.

He ate his dinner that day in high good humour, drank a couple of glasses of port, and retired (as his custom was on warm afternoons) to his back parlour for an hour's siesta. Through the open window he heard the residue of his pigeons murmuring in their cote, and the sound wooed him to slumber. So for half an hour he slept, with an easy conscience, a sound digestion and a yellow bandanna handkerchief over his head to protect him from the flies. A tapping at the door awakened him.

"There's a woman here— Long Halloran's wife, of Back Street— wishes to see you sir," announced the voice of Mrs. Salt.

"Woman," said the mayor testily, "haven't you learned by this time that I'm not to be disturbed after dinner?"

"She said her business was important, sir. It's — it's about the pigeons," explained Mrs. Salt, and before he could protest again Mrs. Halloran had thrust her way into the room and stood curtsying, with tears of recent weeping upon her homely and extremely dirty face. Behind her shuffled a lanky sheepish-eyed boy, who took up his stand at her shoulder with a look half-sullen, half-defiant.

"It's about my Mike, sir," began Mrs. Halloran in a lachrymose voice, and paused to dab her eyes with a comer of her apron. "Which I'm sure, sir, we ought to be very grateful to you for all your kindness and the trouble you're takin' and so says the boy's father. For he's growin' up more of a handful every day, and how to manage him it passes our wits."

"Are you telling me, Mrs. Halloran, that this boy of yours is the thief who stole my pigeons?" Mr. Pinsent, looking at the boy with a magisterial frown, began to wish he had not been quite so hasty in sending round the town sergeant.

"You did, didn't you, Mike?" appealed Mrs. Halloran, and Mike, looking straight before him, grunted something which might pass for an admission. ''You must try to overlook the boy's manner, sir. He's case-hardened, I fear, and it goes sore to a mother's heart that ever I should rear up a child to be a thief. But as Halloran said to me, 'Take the young limb to His Worship,' Halloran says, 'and maybe a trifle of correction by a gentleman in His Worship's position will have some effect,' he says. But I hope, sir, you won't visit all the punishment on Mike; for he didn't do it alone."

"My good woman, I — I have no such intention," stammered the mayor.

"I thank Your Worship." Mrs. Halloran dropped a quick curtsy. "And so I made free to tell Halloran, who was in doubt of it."

"Yes, yes!" The mayor took her up impatiently. "Er— by the way, what age is your son?"

"Rising fifteen, sir; christened fifteen years ago last St. Michael's Day, which is the twenty-ninth of September, though little good it done him. He takes after his father, sir. All the Hallorans shoot up tall, like runner beans, and thick in the bone. Or so his father says. For my part I've never been to Ireland, but by the looks of 'en you'd say not a day less than seventeen. It seems like blood-money, my takin' five shillin' and handin' the child over— at his tender age— and me his own mother that nursed 'en!"

Here Mrs. Halloran, whose emotions had been mastering her for some moments, broke down in a violent fit of sobbing, and this so affected her offspring that he emitted a noise like the hoot of a dog. As he started it without warning, so abruptly he ended it.

It was uncanny. It shook the mayor's nerve.

"My dear Mrs. Halloran, if you will let me have a word or two with your son—"

"Oh, I know!" she wailed. "That's how you put it. But you give me over the money, sir, and let me go quick before I weaken on it! You never had a child of your own, Mr. Pinsent— and more's the pity for the child— but with one of your own you'd know what it feels like!"

Mr. Pinsent felt in his trouser-pocket, drew forth two half-crowns and pressed them into Mrs. Halloran's dirty palm. With a sob and a blessing she escaped. He heard her run sobbing down the passage to the front door.

The boy had sidled round with his back against the wall, and stood there with his left elbow up and his fists half clenched.

"Sit down, Mike," said the mayor gently.

"Coo! what d'ye take me for?"

"Sit down, I tell you."

"Huh— yes, an' let you cop me over the head ? You just try it— that's all!"

"I— er— have no intention of trying it," said Mr. Pinsent. "It certainly would not become me to administer— to inflict — corporal punishment on a youth of your— er— inches."

" Why," he went on with the air of one making a pleasant little discovery, " I shouldn't be surprised to find you almost as tall as myself ! Yes. I declare I believe you are quite as tall! No—" he put up a hand as Mike, apparently suspecting a ruse, backed in a posture of defence— "we will not take our measures to-day. I have something more serious to think about For you will have noticed that while I suspected this robbery to be the work of small thoughtless boys I treated it lightly, but now that I find a great strapping fellow like you mixed up in the affair it becomes my business to talk to you seriously."

And he did. He sat down facing Mike Halloran across the table, and read him a lecture that should have made any boy of Mike's size thoroughly ashamed of himself, and might have gone on admonishing for an hour had not Mrs. Salt knocked again at the door.

"If you please," announced Mrs. Salt, "here's the Widow Bamicutt along with her red-headed 'Dolphus."

"Which," said the Widow Bamicutt, panting in at her heels and bobbing a curtsy, "it's sorry I am to be disturbin' Your Worship, and I wouldn't do it if his poor father was alive and could give 'en the strap for his good. But the child bein' that out of hand that all my threats do seem but to harden him, and five shillin' a week's wage to an unprovided woman— and I hope Your Worship will excuse the noise I make with my breathin', which is the assma, and brought on by fightin' my way through the other women."

Mr. Pinsent gasped and put up a hand to his brow.

"The other women?" he echoed.

"The passage is full of 'em," said Mrs. Salt, much as though she were reporting that the house was on fire.

"Ay," said the widow, "but my 'Dolphus is the guilty one— I got his word for it."

"There's Maria Bunny," persisted Mrs. Salt, beginning to tick off the list on her fingers: "Maria Bunny with her Wesley John, and Mary Polly Polwame with her Nine Days' Wonder, and Amelia Trownce with the twins, and Deb Hicks with the child she christened Nonesuch, thinkin' 'twas out of the Bible, and William Spargo's second wife Maria with her stepchild, and Catherine Nance with her splay-footed boy that I can never remember the name of—"

"Oh, send 'em away! " bawled Mr. Pinsent. "Send 'em away before their husbands come home from work and raise a riot!" Then he recollected himself. "No, fetch 'em all in here from the street," said he, dropping into a chair and taking his head in both hands. "Fetch 'em all in, and let me deal with 'em!"

The town, when it laughed over the story next day, found the cream of the joke in this— Bester Pinsent in promising Mrs, Halloran that her boy should but share punishment with the rest, had forgotten in his agitation of mind to stipulate that the reward should also be divided. As it was, he had paid her the full five shillings, and the rest of the women (there were twenty-four) would be content with nothing less.

But it was really little Mr. Lupus, the schoolmaster, that— all unconsciously— had the last word. Trotting past Butcher Trengove's shop next morning, on his way to open school, Mr. Lupus caught sight of His Worship standing within the doorway and halted.

"Mr. Mayor, sir, if I may have a word with you? Begging your pardon, sir, but it lies on my conscience— all night, sir, it has been troubling me— that I boasted to you yesterday of my boys' good attendance. Indeed, sir, it has been good in the past. But yesterday afternoon! Oh, sir, I fear that you were right after all, and something serious is amiss with the boys of this town!"

I regret that I cannot report here the precise words of Mr. Pinsent's reply.

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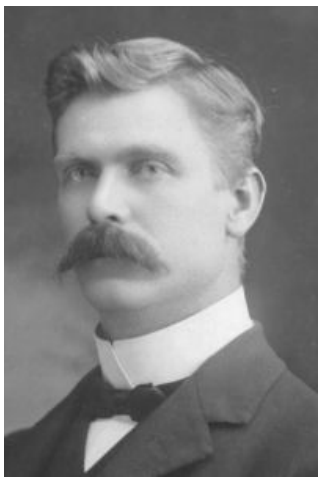
18: The Story of the *Nymph*

Roderic Quinn

1867-1949

The Bulletin, 24 Jan 1903



Roderic Quinn

THE THINGS set down here did not happen yesterday, nor the day before, nor yet so very long ago either, because the conditions of settlement in Australia do not allow of any great historical remoteness.

The place of their happening was a Northern port.

The fog had lifted, showing her at anchor— a fore-and-aft schooner, stoutly built. She had no pretensions to beauty, but her building had cost a year's work. Two of her builders stood on the pier looking at her, with no little light of satisfaction in their eyes. One of these was Chris Anderson, coasting skipper, and the other Ralph George, his man. As they stood watching her from the shore two women joined them, and they all four began to talk together.

One of the women had dark eyes and a pale face, and she said, speaking of the schooner:

"How proud you ought to feel, Chris Anderson, in seeing your work done at last!"

There was a note of coldness in her voice, which perhaps the man did not fail to notice; but, nevertheless, her words were a pleasant morsel to Chris Anderson, who was not without vanity, and his eyes sparkled.

"She's not so very pretty, perhaps," he said— and then he looked from the pale-faced woman to the other woman beside her, "but she's strong and well-fashioned, and that's all that a man of my taste wants."

Ralph, with eyes fixed on the women's faces, watched the effect of his master's words. Rachel Raymond, the dark-eyed woman, turned her face away, as though to watch a wheeling sea-bird.

In her heart she was saying, "Does he love me? Is he faithless? Is this man, too, a liar?"

The other woman, Jeanette Hazard, gold-haired, of robust build, with lips like ripe, red fruit, smiled richly at the skipper's speech. She did not look away, but sought his eyes, and in heart she said, "One must love to win. This man is mine. I have won him."

They talked on of the schooner and kindred subjects, of ships built at the same port, their fates and fortunes, and of how those who built them had grown rich or gone down to paupers' graves, and, presently, one of the women said, "But you have not shown us the figurehead yet, Chris."

Anderson looked towards the other woman as though inviting a word from her. She stood there, pale, uninterested, emotionless.

"Yes, let us see it," she said, but without enthusiasm.

He gave a nervous little nod to Ralph, and Ralph got aboard and soon was busy at the cords which bound a flag around the figurehead. The two women watched him, one seemingly without enthusiasm; the other with a face put forward, eager eyes, and lips slightly parted. As the flag fell away from the figurehead there was a laugh and a sob, but the sob was not heard because the laugh oversounded it. The figure was that of a woman— the carving of the woman Chris loved.

"It is Jeanette!" cried Rachel.

"Oh, Rachel!" cried Jeanette, "I do not think I am half so beautiful."

Rachel made no answer; all was evident, the figurehead proved it.

"What are you going to call the schooner?" asked Jeanette as they turned to go.

"The *Nymph*," said Chris Anderson.

"Why not the *Coquette*?" asked Rachel, bitterly.

Jeanette flushed and her eyes darkened. Hot words crowded into her mouth, but she controlled them.

"At any rate the Coquette has won," she thought to herself.

ii

RACHEL and Chris had grown up together. Rachel was daughter of the lighthouse-keeper, and Chris's father was a shipwright. They had gone to school together, where they sat in the same seat and read out of the one book. They had plucked flowers on Sunday afternoons in the flower season, and

bound them into posies. They had hunted the bush for honey-trees. They had shared each other's secrets and made a common treasury of their prizes. If Rachel, walking through the bush with her eyes about her, spied the scarlet body of a parrot disappearing in a tree-hole, she would write a line on her slate and show it to Chris, and Chris, would be jumping out of his boots— all eagerness and far thoughts till school was dismissed. Then they would shed the rest of their companions by some little artifice or another, and Rachel would lead the way to the treasure-tree and stand below with spread apron, while Chris climbed the trunk, and if the young birds were feathered, rob the nest and flutter them down to the girl underneath. Often when the tide was out, Chris, with trousers above his knees, would tread the mud flats for cockles, while Rachel with a looped frock followed him, bag in hand, to gather his harvest. All the boys and girls called them sweethearts. Chris worried at the sound of the word, but it only made Rachel merry. There was another boy who hated to hear the term applied to them— a quiet, grey-eyed boy of Chris's age.

One day Rachel and her friend went honey-hunting. They took their lunch, as they intended to pass a long day in the open. They went from hill to hollow, the boy with a catapult, and the girl with a stick for snakes. The trees were tall, so tall that a parrot on a top limb seemed scarcely larger than a swallow. Sometimes a flock of white cockatoos would sweep through the foliage overheard, screaming harshly. Now and again they found an opossum in a log, and his bright, frightened eyes would peer out at them from the semi-darkness. They caught lizards, some of them colored a bright bronze, and some that had preposterously large mouths, yellow as saffron.

Once they heard a lyre-bird calling, and they trod gently, avoiding dry twigs because of the snap they might make, but all their trouble went for nothing, as they never came within sight of the bird. They found near a clear pool the skeleton of a great kangaroo, but the tail was missing, and that showed that it died by man's hand. A little further on they crossed a creek on stepping-stones, but these were like no other stepping-stones in the world-being a row of bullocks skulls, horned and white as lime. They went down many valleys and up many hills, and the shadows grew longer all the time till the sun sank.

Then suddenly they paused and turned about. They had gone very far.

They said to one another that it would be almost dark before they got back. Then, though they were tired they walked quickly, Chris, in the lead and Rachel at his heels; but the twilight deepened as they moved, and still no break m the trees showed before them. In a little while they ran, but their limbs wore stiff, and, after a time, they stopped. Chris looked at Rachel, and Rachel's lips quivered.

It was almost night now, and they blundered on till a thorny branch, swinging back after Chris had passed, lashed the girl across the face, and made little spots of blood start from her cheeks

She did not cry out. She did not let Chris know her hurt. Rachel had in her the makings of that kind of woman who can suffer in silence; but when they came to a creek, she washed the red drops from her face, and they rested awhile. It was there that tiredness conquered them, and they gave way utterly. Their feet ached savagely, and they were tired all over. On the farther side of the creek they found a log, and with their backs against this they sat down side by side.

"I wonder what they are thinking at home?" said Rachel

Chris made no answer.

The darkness thickened in the undergrowth around them. The silence was so all-prevailing that there seemed no living thing in the world save themselves. Chris remembered a dead man who had been found two years before in the scrub hereabouts. He put the thought away from him at first, but it recurred with such persistency that he said to Rachel, "Do you remember how blue and swollen the dead man's tongue was?"

Rachel, with a little shudder, answered, "Oh Chris, don't talk of it!"

A wind came up and rushed through the trees. It lifted the dead leaves and flung them into Rachel's laps. An old story recurred to the girl. Was it "Eugene Aram" or the "Babes in the Wood?" At any rate it seemed like a burial had begun.

"Did you hear that?"— it was a quick whisper from the boy, and the girl sat up and listened with all her might. It came again, presently, a short, harsh scream, the cry of something in fierce pain. It was not human; it needed articulation. Accompanying it came a sound of blundering, as of a blind thing moving.

The girl and boy stared into the dark. Even in daylight the situation would have had its terrors. Darkness made it appalling. An old bogey of her nursery days, invented for the purpose of keeping her from straying, recurred to Rachel. They told her that a lion haunted the bush. As she aged she came to laugh at the story. But tonight, with the mysterious cry in her ears, all her old fears, tenfold magnified, returned to her. The things of our imagination take shape in the darkness, and when the mind is overwrought the unseen is terrible. Certainly, after all, this might be the lion ravenous, wounded, savage, smelling her blood upon the wind. She crept closer to the boy, and put her arms about his neck. But the imagination is inexorable; it allows of no consolation. It isolates its victim beyond the reach of comfort. No doubt she only fancied it, vet it seemed that the boy shrank from her, appeared unwilling

to be associated in the sacrifice to which she considered herself doomed— surrendered her, as it were, to the fate which menaced her. For a whole hour the tiling cried and blundered in the darkness. Then the sounds grew faint and passed away, and, a while after, the boy put his head on the girl's lap and slept.

It is not easy to trace the beginning of love— that first pressure of hands, that glance of eyes which gives outward sign that the swift, sweet, subtle poison is working in the blood. In this hour, with Rachel, love began. Her hands wandered through the boy's hair, and no doubt her touch soothed him ; for he slept well.

In the morning, they bathed their feet in the creek, and chewed wild hop-leaves to stay their hunger. They moved through the bush swiftly. The newness of the day filled them with confidence. In an hour or two— before noon, at any rate— they would surely be home. What good things there would be to eat! The stories they had to tell would make them heroes for a long time. No one ever had such adventures as they. Ralph George had passed many nights in the bush— his father was a timber-getter— but had Ralph ever heard the sounds that had come to them? Not he; no one in the world had. After all, it was well worth while being lost for a little time to have such an experience.

The hour went by, then another hour, then another, and, at last, the tree-trunks cast no shadow. It was noon. They were hot— how hot they were, and their heads seemed full of wheels. They were hungry, too, so hungry that they almost could have gone down on their knees and eaten the earth. Yes, they were very hungry, but not so hungry as they were hot. At times, they strayed apart, but it was always Chris who strayed from Rachel. The girl kept close to him now, not for consolation, as on the previous night, but as his consoler.

It might have been an hour after noon that Rachel paused suddenly. Before her lay a thick, black pool of blood, on which flies feasted. She looked at it without amazement. It amazed neither of them. They were too amazed at their own hunger to feel astonishment at anything else.

There were drops of blood on the leaves leading away from the pool. Here, at any rate, was something to follow. It seemed they had been wandering aimlessly all the time. It was necessary they should have guidance. Anything in the world would do to guide them. The trail of blood, failing any other clue. They followed it. In some places the blood was red; where the sun had found it out it was black. Black or red it was always a flies' feast. Now and then they came on a pool that told of plenteous bleeding.

At length, they saw the cause, of it all. A horse stood drooping in front of them. A stick of wood about the thickness of a man's arm was thrust into his chest. The stick was red and wet. In a moment of wild panic, perhaps with dingoes at his heels, he had run upon it. In a little while he would die, his

heaving flanks and dull eyes told that. This, then, was the cause of last night's mysterious noises. But they felt no interest now either in the noises or their cause. All they had to do was to go on. They passed under the broken limb of a tall tree. The limb was not completely severed, one part from the other, and the leafy end of it rested on the ground. Rachel said, afterwards, that it seemed like passing through a doorway into a great green cathedral.

They must have walked in a circle after this, because some time afterwards they saw this limb to their left, and later, they had an impression that they saw it again. It lay somewhere to the right on the second occasion.

Ralph George, the quiet, grey-eyed boy found them sitting on a log. Both had lost their hats, and their faces were scratched all over. He gave them bread and a drink of water, and then he took Rachel, who limped painfully, round the waist and she put her arm around his neck, and in such fashion they moved away. Though the girl did not know till long after, that was the happiest day that Ralph had ever had.

iii

THE new barmaid from Sydney caused a flutter in the district. She was tall and buxom and had hair of an angry gold. The young fellows went mad about her. They talked of and toasted Jeanette Hazard till there seemed to be no other woman in the world. They fluttered around her like a lot of silly moths—very content to be accounted silly so long as they were allowed to flutter. Anyway, if the wings were burned, the burning gave a certain amount of pleasure. As for Jeanette Hazard, admiration to her was as a fine wine on the palate.

Chris Anderson owned two schooners, and was thinking of building a third when Jeanette came to the district. He had sailed in charge of one, the *White Duck*, without seeing her, and it was some months before he came back. She was on the pier one day, when the *White Duck* sailed up the port and dropped anchor close in. A boat put off from the schooner, and Chris Anderson landed.

"Who is that?" she asked of a companion as the young man went by.

"Chris Anderson," was the answer.

"A fine man," she commented.

Chris Anderson went to visit Rachel.

"Who is the. new young lady?" he asked of her.

"Jeanette Hazard."

If then and there Rachel had taken a dislike to Jeanette there would have been little cause for wonder. But Rachel trusted Chris. A hundred times he had

vowed his love for her, and it had been sealed— lovers know how. To doubt him would have seemed something like a sacrilege.

Still, Rachel did not know Jeanette. She did not know her history. It is enough to say she had one.

"Are you going to build a new schooner, Mr. Anderson?" asked Jeanette.

The young man looked at her. Her face was full of passion in repose. He thought of Rachel, and mentally compared the two women. They were like roses, but one was a red rose.

"Yes, we start next week," he said.

Of Ralph, Jeanette Hazard asked: "How long do you expect to be at work on the schooner? "

"A year, maybe," Ralph replied.

Jeanette smiled. She would have plenty of time, at any rate.

Months went by and the drama took definiteness. It is easy to capture an unsuspecting heart. One has so much time to spread the net, and cast the toils, that the evil is well nigh done ere the victim becomes aware that his freedom has vanished. Then it is mostly too late to struggle.

With Jeanette and Chris it began with a walk under the stars, between the pier and the hotel. Chris was silent most of the time, but Jeanette talked every step of the way merrily, meaningly perchance. The next time Chris met Rachel he thought her face very pale— a trifle too pale, in fact. A little color in her cheeks would be an improvement. He thought of the rich color in Jeanette's cheeks.

A month afterwards he said:

"Are you coming to the dance to-morrow night, Rachel?"

"Father is sick," Rachel replied; "I cannot go."

Chris did not look half so dejected as he should have looked. A man cannot make his features the pliable instruments of hypocrisy with such ease as can a woman. Still, he contrived to appear disappointed, and Rachel said: "But you go, Chris. Don't let me keep you away."

Chris went, and, in spite of Rachel's absence, managed to make himself happy— managed so well, in fact, that certain information reached Rachel's ears, and Rachel started from her dream with a bitter word on her lips.

"He carves like an artist," said Ralph one day, as he and Jeanette talked together. "He is at work on the figurehead for the new schooner."

"Have you seen it? What is it to be?"

Jeanette asked, carelessly.

Ralph laughed quietly.

"The image of the girl he loves."

Jeanette's lips parted in a half-laugh.

"Who is that?" she asked.

Ralph looked at her doubtingly.

"Surely you know," he said.

"Of course, of course," she hastened to say, and, still with her eyes searching Ralph's, she said again, "Of course."

"He is very secret with it," Ralph added.

Jeanette nodded.

"It is a curious fancy," she remarked.

"A family fancy," explained Ralph; "for four generations his family have been sea-farers. They always had such an image for their figure-head. They said it brought them luck."

"How strange!" mused Jeanette.

And yet it was not strange. Since men first learnt to sail the seas they have carried the faces of their loved ones in their hearts. Is it any wonder, then, that Chris. Anderson should desire to a little further make the inward devotion an outward act, and carry such a resemblance at his ship's bow. It would go before him in storm and peril, guiding him always, and is there any better guide in the world than Love? But, if the love be not pure, is there any worse betrayer?

iv

SO! and Jeanette had triumphed— no need for words. The figurehead had proved it. Rachel wrapped up the ring and trinkets that Chris had given her, and she gave the packet to Ralph.

"Take it to him," she said, with a sad smile, "and— and— and tell him I wish him luck."

Ralph looked for a word to comfort her. "If I had the choice, Rachel," he began, but she interrupted him, speaking hoarsely, "Stop ! I will never more trust any man. "

Nevertheless, Ralph could have kissed her tremulous white hand, could have put it on his bosom and covered it with kisses.

Chris and Jeanette were married shortly after. It was such a wedding as the little place had never seen before, for Jeanette was fond of show. When Chris, was away trading, Jeanette stayed with Ralph's mother. As for Rachel, she helped to tend the light-house lantern, and at night watched the ships pass across its path of light from darkness to darkness, as lives journey through a time of love.

Ralph sailed with Chris, but, when the *Nymph* was in port and Chris, with Jeanette, he went up to the lighthouse and sat with Rachel. He did not care to

talk of Jeanette or Chris, and there were few other subjects which mutually interested them. All the time he wanted to say one thing, and all else beside that thing seemed tame as a twice-told tale. After an hour or two of broken conversation he would leave, cursing the cowardice that tied his tongue. Once, however, she gave him a skein of silk to hold, and while he held it, her fingers played round about his hands as she unwound it. The touch of them was a sweet intimacy— a promise.

A year after the marriage Ralph came to her.

"They are going away," he said.

"Where?" she asked.

"To the Pacific Islands," he replied, "on a trading cruise."

Her pale face was bent down over her sewing, and he could not see her eyes.

"She, too?" she said.

"Yes— it will be a long trip. She would not stay behind."

She stitched tremulously: the stitching grew irregular.

"I am going, too, " he said.

She looked up at him.

"Are you?" she asked calmly. "I am sorry."

Suddenly his quietude gave way.

"Oh, Rachel," he said, "I love you!"

She threw her sewing from her and rose. Her eyes flashed.

"Then suffer!" she said.

Ralph drew back his face as though he had been struck on the forehead.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"All," she answered.

He walked to the door, and there paused.

"But I will come again, Rachel," he said as he passed out, taking the girl's pale face and dark eyes with him.

And what of the girl? Well, that night when Rachel closed her eyes their lids were wet.

TWO years went by before he fulfilled his promise. In the interim Rachel's father had died, and she felt the need of a life on which to lean.

"His wife left him," said Ralph, "in Auckland. She went away with an American. He became unbearable afterwards and took to drink. In a drunken fit he wrecked the *Nymph*. He talks of coming home again. He says there is one here who will make him happy."

Rachael smiled.

"He should have thought of that before," she said.

"It was an evil genius that brought them together," Ralph remarked.

Rachel blushed.

"Evil for him, you mean," she said.

Ralph nodded. He was remarking how beautifully her dark hair matched the paleness of her forehead. He grew desperate,

"He is coming home again—"

She lifted her eyes.

"You have said that twice."

"—And he must not find you single, or he will say—"

"Just so, but whom am I to marry ?"

Ralph jumped to his feet, and ran to her with outstretched hands. She gave herself up to him, laughingly.

"But it is revenge?" said Ralph, somewhat gloomily.

"More in love than in revenge," she replied, smiling. And perhaps 'twas so.

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19: Devereux's Last Smoke

Izola Forrester

1878-1944

The Ocean, March 1907

Izola Louise Forrester Page

Prolific American author and screen writer

"DID YOU ever happen to notice," asked Barnaby irrelevantly, "how a man looks smoking a cigar in a fog? You can see the light of the cigar as he draws on it, but not the man behind. Sort of headlight effect, you know. Once, when I was crossing on this same boat four years ago, I saw the light from a cigar, but there wasn't any man behind it.

"It was a ghost cigar."

Reardon laughed from his end of the settee.

"Barnaby, boy, you're liable to see anything, afloat or ashore, given favourable conditions. What had you been smoking yourself?"

Barnaby lighted a cigarette and ignored the speaker. The rest of us in that corner of the smoking-room listened.

IT WAS the fourth day out from Sandy Hook.

The *Königen Teresa* was ploughing an unsteady course through a dense fog, grey-white, like the edge of an August thunder-cloud. It had kept up for a day and a half, so far. On deck it was raw and damp, as only mid-Atlantic can be in March. The waves lurched choppily against the boat. You could hear the steady, monotonous breaking of them, but not an inch of sea was visible in the greyness.

Barnaby had just come in off deck. He was aggressively cheerful and buoyant, under the circumstances. The weather had reduced every one else to a state of limp endurance. The fog had settled on everything, including brains, and when Barnaby came jauntily in we were ready to welcome anything as a diversion, even Barnaby.

Every other minute the fog-horn mourned dismally.

"Wish that thing would hush itself," said Barnaby. "It always makes me think of a cow crying after the calf the butcher has taken away, and I'm awfully sympathetic by nature. And it makes me think, too, of that particular cigar I was speaking of. I don't believe in ghosts. I want to say that, first of all, before I swear I saw one. Any one present remember the late Charlie Devereux?"

"Wasn't that the fellow who married Irene Irving?" Reardon asked lazily.

Reardon's partner at whist looked up at Barnaby for the first time since his entrance from deck and waited for Reardon to play, but the dramatic critic laid down his hand and turned his chair toward Barnaby.

"That's the one," said Barnaby. "Used to be all-around good boy from Union Square up to Times. Not a coupon-cutter, you know, nor a coin-flasher. He had to work once in a while, like the rest of us, but he had a nice little anti-worry sinking-fund planted somewhere, so that when the rainy day happened along he never went out minus an umbrella. And the umbrella was silk at that. Any one else here knew Charlie Devereux?"

Nearly all of us remembered him, although four years is a large cairn to raise over a person's memory along Broadway; but Devereux was different, and the crowd at the card-tables in that end of the smoking-room followed Reardon's suit and laid down their hands. It sounded better than fog-bound whist.

"If there was a man behind that cigar, or, rather, the ghost of a man, that ghost was Charlie Devereux," Barnaby went on. "Who's to the listen?"

"Fire ahead," said Reardon. "But stick to facts, Barnaby. Cold, foggy facts, you know. Never mind local colour in chunks."

"The story tells itself," retorted Barnaby with dignity. "I merely happened to be the phonographic record. I don't believe in it myself, even though I know I saw the whole thing. But for Charlie's sake it should be told, because it shows a degree of sagacity and general long-headed cleverness that no ghost ever let on to before.

"I met Charlie for the first time about a year before he married Miss Irving. One night I found myself cornered up around Forty-Second and Sixth with a crowd of good fellows and only ten dollars left in my own private bank. Charlie Devereux staked me. It was particularly decent because he had only known me about fifteen minutes and the stake was yellow paper. He told me to take it,

and said that a man who wasn't good for twenty dollars wasn't good for anything, and it was worth losing twenty dollars to find him out."

"That's like Devereux."

"Why, sure it was. He was simply great in that line. I guess he'd loaned twenty-dollar bills to nearly every new youngster who fell broke along that way for ten years."

"More than that," said Reardon. "And some of the old ones, too."

"But he didn't lose much on the game," Barnaby replied. "The youngsters generally paid up, because it was like lending money to yourself. You could always go after it the next time. Anyway, one day we heard he'd married Irene Irving and they had sailed for Europe in a hurry on the Königen Teresa. It was glad news to the little isle that loved him. We wished him well, especially as he had picked out the loveliest girl of that season's Broadway stage."

Barnaby paused to light a fresh cigarette, and Reardon's partner leaned across the table and offered his match-box.

It was a small ivory death's-head with jewelled eyes. Barnaby looked at it with quick interest, and for an instant met the glance of its owner, then went on:

"Nobody along Broadway seemed to know anything special about Irene Irving. She just happened. It was her second season, so she said, and she had a glorious voice, and a face that didn't need any make-up. She got her chance without the asking.

"When they put on 'Fleurette' at the Casino Dunbar he saw a chance, and gave her a song to sing about breaking hearts and sighing waves, and that sort of stuff, with a mermaid mixed up in it, and at the end of the second act Irving sang it dressed in a five-thousand-dollar fish-net hung with real pearls. It was a joyous stunt, and the first-nighters hunted up her name on the program when the curtain fell."

"Devereux found it quick," said Reardon slowly. "They were engaged the next week."

"And married the fifth." Barnaby looked up quizzically at Reardon's partner. "They sailed for Europe on their honeymoon on this very boat, and we all lost track of Charlie except the rumours that floated over of a touring-car and general joy-bell state of affairs. Charlie had to be back in August, and he booked their passage on the same steamer. Point of sentiment, I suppose.

"The rest is left to hearsay and the press-agent, so to speak. Nobody knows how it happened. He was seen walking on deck that evening with Irene, and they seemed to be having trouble, but she left him and went to her stateroom, so that let her out, you understand. But somewhere in the deep sea at that

particular point the mermaids are feeding pearls sautés to one good fellow—Charlie Devereux."

"And she wore violet mourning."

"That's correct," said Barnaby. "Lord, I can see her now swinging up Riverside with the neatest team on the path. Didn't seem to take to the gasoline after Charlie's death. Went in for the swell seclusion, and all that. Dressed in violet from head to foot. Violet crape widow's veil, even, and her hair was baby golden. Remember her, Reardon, old chap?

"French *crêpon* violet gown, elbow gloves in violet suéde, and shoes to match. It didn't do a thing to little Manhattan. Broadway in September is like an impressionable kid at twenty-one. It is ready to worship anything just as long as it is something. And the violet widow of Charlie Devereux dawned on it with the tender pathetic glory of a purple-and-pearl twilight— and took.

"But she declined to mingle with the happy, care-free throng of climbers. Charlie had left her a bully little fortune and not a single restriction to the will except that she wear the violet for at least a year. And just exactly six months and four days after he had been transformed into submarine sauté, aforesaid, I met the widow as a fellow passenger on this boat and she was on her way to marry Jack Beaufort Crane."

"Don't know him," interposed Reardon.

"Hardly any one did, but he was all right. The Review had him out in the Orient for about ten years as special correspondent. He missed home comforts, but had the luck to get shut up in Port Arthur at the siege, and the better luck to get out. Charlie helped him, and when the honeymoon was shining brightly on the other side he thought he'd look up Jack."

Reardon's partner tapped softly with the little death's-head match-box on the felt-covered table as Barnaby paused, and again his eyes met those of Barnaby, but he said nothing.

"Crane was connected with the American embassy in Paris, so Mrs. Devereux told me," continued Barnaby deliberately. "I happened to be the only one on board whom she knew, and that means a good deal with a six-day sea trip ahead of one. Before we had passed through the Narrows she had told me how dear and sweet and lovely Charlie had been to her, but that she was going now to the only man she had ever loved.

"Well, anyway, along about the third day we struck this sort of weather and Irene grew reminiscent. Took to walking deck and not eating regularly. I didn't mind it so much, because she usually let me trot along for cheerful company, as it were. Sort of fog antidote, don't you see?

"And she had dropped the violet on New Year's as a good resolution. Used to pace deck in a long dark-blue cloak lined with Stuart plaid, and a cap to

match on her blond curls. I rather preferred it to the violet myself. She seemed to dread being alone, and I didn't blame her, as we drew near the probable spot where Charlie had dropped, overboard.

"I was sitting in here smoking, the fourth afternoon, sitting right over where Dillingham is now, when she sent for me to come at once.

"It was so thick on deck you couldn't see your own hand an arm's length from your face. I groped about until I found her standing over the port rail up forward, and the instant she caught sight of me she gave a frightened little cry and caught hold of my arm.

" 'Barney,' she exclaimed— 'Barney, for the love of Heaven, tell me I am not going out of my mind. Tell me you see something there—there, right in front of us. Oh, Barney, can't you see it?' "

"Stick to facts, Barnaby, boy—c old facts," warned Reardon.

Barnaby did not notice him. He was keeping one eye on the face of Reardon's partner, but this time there was no answering glance. Barnaby threw away a dead cigarette-stub and leaned forward in his chair, his elbows on his knees, his jolly, boyish face a bit moody in its expression.

"I said I didn't believe in ghosts, didn't I? Well, don't forget that as one of the facts in the case. But what I saw was this, and it was daylight, too—about three in the afternoon, I should say.

"Right there in front of us, not four feet away, was the light of a cigar, and I'll swear there was no living man behind it. You could see it as plainly as I can see the light on your cigar-tips now, except for the fog-haze, of course. It glowed steadily there in front of us, every now and then brightening and darkening again, as a lighted cigar does when you draw on it."

"Was there any smoke?" asked Reardon, leaning forward also.

"I couldn't tell, on account of the fog. And while we looked Mrs. Devereux suddenly slipped beside me in a dead faint and the light died away. Not all at once, mind, but as I held her up from the deck in my arms I saw it move slowly in mid-air out beyond the rail and so fade away.

"When she was able, she talked with me down in the cabin.

"She had seen it every time she went on deck, she said, since the boat had reached the open sea. Whether she walked on deck in daylight or at night, it had appeared beside her, and followed her as she walked, as though some one kept her company and smoked as they walked.

" 'Just as Charlie always did,' she added to me. 'Sometimes I fancy I can even catch a whiff of the particular tobacco he liked. When you have been with me, though, it has never appeared until now.

" 'It is Charlie— I know it is. Why, it follows me from one side of the boat to the other. I have tried walking on both sides, just to test it. I did not dare tell

any one but you, for fear they would think I was going out of my mind. If you had not seen it also to-day I should have believed so myself, but you did see it, didn't you, Barney? Tell me you saw it, too, and that it is the light of a cigar.'"

"Maybe you were both crazy," suggested Dillingham pleasantly, as the silence grew oppressive. "Don't lay it on too thick, Barney. The fog may lift."

"It did lift the next morning," said Barnaby. "It was clear and sunny, and we never saw a sign of the ghost cigar all day. Mrs. Devereux did not show up, though, until afternoon, and then she looked mighty bad. I tried to jolly her out of it, and even said I wasn't sure myself that I had seen the light, but it was no good, she only continued to stare out at the water, and would not talk to me.

" 'What's the use?' she said. 'It's Charlie. I don't blame him for troubling me if he is able to. I would if I were in his place. We had quarrelled that last night over Jack. He asked me if I wanted to be free, and I said I did, of course, but I didn't mean the freedom he gave me. I didn't want him to die; I only wanted to be free, so that I could marry Jack.'

" 'But if he wanted to make you free and happy, and would go so far as to kill himself, why on earth should you suppose he would come back to smoke ghost cigars around you now and set you nearly mad?' I asked her.

" 'Oh, but he doesn't mean any harm,' she said. 'I know him so well. He doesn't do it to— to haunt me— that's what they call it, isn't it? If he loved me well enough to die for me, surely he would not harm me now that I am going to Jack.'

" 'But the year limit,' I suggested, rather cautiously.

" 'I didn't think it mattered, and Jack wanted to be married at Easter. Easter is so pretty in Paris, and we were going to have a violet wedding.'"

"Half-mourning bridal in memory of the late lamented Charlie," suggested Reardon. "I never did care very much for widows."

"But the ghost cigar had settled the violet wedding," Barnaby continued. "She just wouldn't see it any other way but that Charlie wanted her. The fifth day, that was. I tried to cheer her up by saying we would hit Cherbourg the next day, but she couldn't get the old point of view back again. She had lost her grip. After dinner I found her at the same place on deck, leaning over the rail.

" 'I want you to do something for me,' she said. 'When you reach Paris I want you to send or give this package to Jack for me. It belonged to Charlie, but it's a gift that Jack sent to him himself from Japan, and I want him to have it back. He will understand how I feel about it.'

"I tried to argue with her, but she persisted, and was so nervous and unstrung that I took the thing to humour her, and promised that Crane should get it on my arrival in Paris. Then, when it grew dark, I coaxed her inside to try

and get her mind off the thing, for she was watching all the time for that fool cigar-light to show up any old place at all, and I didn't like the look in her eyes.

"They were having a concert in the saloon, and I found her a good corner, and some jolly talkers to brace her up. It must have been after ten when we missed her.

"Kalman was playing— Kalman Vorga, the Tzigane violinist. You know the sort of stuff he runs to, Reardon. It makes you feel as if you were either crazy or wanted to be— one of the two. I left the crowd and hurried out on deck with that music chasing me. And when I saw Mrs. Devereux I knew it had driven her out, too, to the darkness and the waves, and Devereux's ghost of a smoke."

"And you found her?"

It was the first time that Reardon's partner had opened his lips since the entrance of Barnaby, and everybody turned to look at him. He was bending toward Barnaby, his face white and tense with emotion, his lips set and stern. Even Barnaby was impressed, and the rest of his story was told directly to the man with the match-box, and not to the rest of us.

"Yes, I did find her, but it was too late to do anything. It was late, you see, and everybody was inside listening to the concert. There wasn't a soul at the point where she stood. The light shone near her this time, not an arm's length away. From where I stood you would have sworn a man was beside her, smoking.

"But all at once the light flickered and moved away. She did not stir, but watched it, as though hypnotized, her beautiful eyes wide and staring. There was no fear in her face—nothing but a strange sort of wonder. The light moved, as I say, away from her, and suddenly she followed it, as though obeying an unheard command. Straight ahead it went, steadily, deliberately, like a cigar-light would move smoked by a man walking leisurely.

"But when it reached the rail it did not stop."

Reardon's partner rose abruptly and leaned across the table toward Barnaby. Between them lay the little ivory death's-head.

"And she followed it?" he demanded.

"She followed it," repeated Barnaby. "With her arms outstretched, as though she obeyed a call I could not hear. She was over the rail before I could reach her. I saw her slip down into the darkness, and the light glowed for an instant, then vanished, too, not quickly, but steadily, slowly, just as the last tip of a cigar goes out. I believe that it was Charlie Devereux's last smoke."

No one spoke.

Reardon's partner stood for a minute staring ahead of him with wide, thoughtful eyes; then he suddenly turned on his heel and went out into the fog.

Barnaby bent forward after he had gone and took the little Japanese match-box in his hand to look at it.

"They make those things awfully well, don't they?" asked Reardon, to relieve the strain.

"Yes," answered Barnaby, "indeed they do. I haven't seen this one for four years. Not since I mailed it in Paris back to Jack Crane. They make them extremely well. Won't some one please go and bring him back? We're just about nearing the place where the aforesaid pearls sautés was possibly served, and the fog gets on one's brain. I happen to know."

"You said you didn't believe the story yourself," said Dillingham nervously, as he started to light his cigar and then let the match burn out, staring at the tip of the cigar.

"I don't." Barnaby stood up and slipped into his cravenette. "I don't believe a word of it— that is, on general principles and a certain prejudice I have against ghosts. I don't mind ghosts as long as they mind their own business and keep to the graveyards, but when they come around Atlantic liners and walk deck and smoke ghost cigars, then I am willing to hand them out the benefit of the doubt. I'm going out after Crane."

"Just a minute," called Reardon. "Was there any smoke to that ghost cigar?"

But Barnaby had swung out on deck after Jack Crane.

The rest of us sat about the table with unlighted cigars, staring at the little ivory death-head's match-box before us and thinking of Charlie Devereux's last smoke.

20: Gentlemen of the Jury

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

The Daily Telegraph (NSW) 1 Jan 1937

Mark John Hellinger

Broadway newspaper columnist, Hollywood movie producer, and prolific short story writer.

IMAGINE a courtroom during one of those cases when neither side placed a pretty woman with shapely legs on the stand. The spectators were bored. The opposing attorneys scowled at each other and said a great deal about nothing. The Jury was having a tough time remaining awake. The judge was sipping a glass of water, wishing it were a highball, and hearing absolutely nothing of what was going on. The case was one involving negligence.

A woman had walked over a grating in front of an apartment house. The grating, she claimed, was loose. She tripped and fell. The ambulance and the lawyer arrived almost simultaneously. And a short time later, the owner of the property was sued for 25,000 dollars by the fallen woman— or rather the lady who fell.

The attorney for the plaintiff could have asked for much more money. As a matter of fact, in cases such as these, it is nothing to sue for 100,000 in the hope that the defendant will settle for 1000 dollars.

But this lawyer— let's call him Mr. Moore— didn't see any sense in carrying this action that far. His case was of the cheese variety, better known as a "schmear-case," and nobody knew it better than he. He had taken the matter on the usual fifty-fifty basis and he had to go through with it. But exactly how little he thought of his chances was plainly indicated when he sued for a measly 25,000 dollars.

Here they were in court, and it was almost time for the jury to retire. Mr. Moore stood before that jury— twelve good men, and most of them untrue— and bellowed what he considered an excellent piece of oratory. There was no

reason why it shouldn't have been excellent. He had been delivering it for twenty years.

With great fervor he pointed out that his client had suffered untold anguish since the sad day she fell upon that grating. He pictured her great agony as she twisted and tossed on a hospital cot. He rang in her grey old mother who was dependent upon her for support. He dramatised the facts to such an extent that he, himself, was actually beginning to feel sorry for the woman

Some twenty minutes later the jury retired. Mr. Moore went over to the attorney for the defence. Harsh words had passed between these two men during the trial. As a matter of fact it looked at one time as though they were going to come to blows.

Mr. Moore looked squarely at his rival. The other man returned the gaze. It was an excellent scene and you would have enjoyed being there. Who knew what pearls o wisdom and cynicism would drop from the lips of these two noted New York attorneys?

Mr. Moore spoke first. "Let's go over to Charlie's for a drink." he said.

"Okay, pal." replied the other man.

That jury was out almost three hours. Mr. Moore couldn't understand it. The case didn't merit that kind of consideration. Not by a long shot. Still and all, there they were. And Mr. Moore began to feel rather happy. When a jury stayed out that long, it could mean but one thing. They were arguing about the amount of money to be given.

As the minutes went by, Mr. Moore began to beam. Anything could happen now. Why, they might award his client 2,000 dollars— or they might even go to 3,000 dollars! What a break this was going to be! And how totally unexpected!

Suddenly the jury filed back. They wanted, it appeared, to ask a question. The judge put away his Racing Form and went back on the bench. The foreman stood up. The rival attorneys looked on with puzzled expressions.

"We would like to know," said the juryman, "about something of which we are in doubt. Is it possible for us to return a verdict of more than 25,000 dollars?"

More than 25,000 dollars! Mr. Moore almost fell through the floor. Good Lord, what a surprise! Absolutely amazing— but it was just as he had always maintained. You never know what a jury will do.

The judge was speaking.

"The answer to your question is 'No' " he asserted. "You are limited to the amount claimed in this action and cannot find a verdict in excess of 25,000 dollars."

The jury filed out again. Mr. Moore swallowed hard and raced to the nearest telephone.

He called his wife.

"Frances," he cried joyously, "I just knocked a jury cold with one of my summations. I'm going to split the largest verdict I ever received in my life. Start to pack, honey, because we're going to spend a month abroad. Maybe we'll spend two months. I don't know. I'm the happiest guy in the world. I'll call you back. Goodbye!"

Another ten minutes and the jury was back again. The defence attorney was biting his nails while Mr. Moore made no effort to conceal his great joy. The judge asked the foreman for his verdict.

The latter gentleman smiled.

"We have decided," he said, "that the defendant is not guilty of negligence."

Not guilty! Mr. Moore turned white. The court room buzzed. What the devil had happened? Here was a jury which had asked about a huge amount and then, a few minutes later, reversed itself completely.

The judge looked as puzzled as the others, but he had the power to do something about it. He dismissed the jury and called the foreman before him.

"This is off the record," he said. "For my own satisfaction, I would like to know just what happened in there. What made you come out and ask that question before if you weren't going to award any damages?"

The foreman shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, Judge," he replied, "it was this way. On the very first vote it was 11 to one for the defendant. The one man who was holding out was the silliest guy I ever saw. No matter what we said, he disagreed. We sat around and sat around and sat around while he kept talking and arguing.

"He finally made a statement that got me nervous. He said that a jury could do anything it wished. He said that, in a case such as this, we could even bring in a verdict for more than the amount asked.

"That was too much for me, your Honor, and I got sore. I said he was wrong and we wound up by making a bet about it. The bet was for 100 dollars in cash and, in addition, he was to give in to us on the verdict if he lost. So we came in and asked you the question. I lost. And that ended the case.

"That's all there is to it, Judge. All you did was settle the bet...."

Out in the corridor Mr. Moore was talking to his wife again. "You can stop packing, Frances," he murmured sadly. "You never know what a jury will do."

21: Not so Dumb

Peter Cheyney

1896-1951

Britannia and Eve, Feb 1942

Peter Cheyney

Featuring Flagg of Counter-intelligence

WHEN Flagg crossed the room to say good-night, Leonore looked at him quicky. She thought he was rather attractive in an undefinable way.

He said: 'Thank you very much for a good party, Mrs. Adams. I've enjoyed myself.' She laughed softly.

'I wonder if that's really true,' she said. 'Most of the time you seemed to be standing in the corner watching people.'

Flagg said: 'I like watching people; but I've talked quite a lot, too. I spent quite seven minutes talking to the delightful Mrs. Soames.'

'I bet I know what you were talking about,' said Leonore. She picked up a silver cigarette box, handed it to him. The gesture indicated subtly that she did not want him to go. 'I expect you were talking about Adela, weren't you?' she went on.

'You're quite right,' he said. 'We were talking about Adela. Tell me, Mrs. Adams, is she really as stupid as they say?'

'She's much worse than that,' she said. 'Adela just can't stop talking. We call her "The Unconscious Fifth Columnist".'

'Why?' asked Flagg.

'Well, she just has to ask questions,' said Leonore Adams. 'If Adela sees a man in uniform she immediately subjects him to the most vivid cross-examination. And she's so beautiful that the poor dears invariably tell her what she wants to know. Then she goes around town telling all her friends.'

Flagg said: 'That is rather stupid, isn't it? I wonder why she does it? You'd think she could find something else to talk about besides the war.'

Leonore nodded.

'Tell me— why are you so interested in her?' she asked.

'It's an odd reason,' said Flagg, 'but Mrs. Soames was telling me that Adela Vallance was a great friend of Jimmie Daynor. I know Jimmie very well— a most serious person. I should have thought that his influence might have done something to stop Adela talking so much.'

Leonore said: 'Well, heaven knows he's tried. He's lectured her about it till we thought their friendship would be definitely broken off.'

'I can imagine Jimmie doing that,' said Flagg. 'I should think a woman who talked would be like a red rag to a bull to him. But I should like to meet her.'

Leonore said: 'Well, you always can.' She looked at her watch. 'It's a quarter to eight now. I bet you any money you like', she went on, 'you'll find Adela at this moment in the cocktail bar at the Hotel Le Due. She's usually there at this time.'

Flagg said: 'I shall be passing the Le Due. I'll look in and take a peek at Adela.'

'Do,' said Leonore. 'Introduce yourself. She's very beautiful. She's worth taking a peek at.'

Flagg said: 'I like looking at beautiful women. That's why I've enjoyed talking to you. Good night! And thanks once again for the party.'

He smiled at her and went away. She stood, for a moment, looking after him, thinking that he was a little odd— but rather nicely odd.

Flagg stood looking through the glass doors of the lounge at the Hotel Le Due into the cocktail bar.

So that was Adela. He began to grin a little. She was beautiful enough, he thought. Beautiful and slim and well turned out and fatuous. Every gesture she made, every expression proclaimed a silly self-satisfaction as egoistic as it was unintentional.

She was talking to three young men, one in khaki— a subaltern— and two junior naval officers. They were all smiling gallantly and, apparently, hanging on her every word.

Flagg wandered into the small bar. He walked casually up to the counter and ordered an old-fashioned. He drank it slowly and listened to Adela's well enunciated and nicely clipped words.

'He said it was too marvellous,' she said. 'Too breath-taking for words. He said it had got every aeroplane gun beaten to a frazzle, that it worked on an entirely new principle— something to do with a gas condenser or something—

I'm sure you know what I mean. Then he told me about another wonderful thing. He told me that...'

Flagg walked out of the bar, through the lounge and into the telephone box at the end of the fawn carpeted passage. He dialled a Riverside number. After a moment he said:

'Is that you, Dizzy? Look, I'm at the Le Due. Yes— she's in the cocktail bar.... In about half an hour. Yes... I think we might chance it. I'll open the ball for you if I get the chance. All right.'

He hung up. He walked back into the deserted lounge and sat down in a position from which he could watch the glass doors of the cocktail bar.

Five minutes passed. Flagg could see the two naval officers making their adieux. They passed through the lounge and disappeared.

Flagg got up, walked through the glass doors into the bar. He walked slowly towards Adela. The subaltern looked at him casually. Flagg thought possibly the young man was relieved at the interruption in the conversation.

He said: 'I'm sorry to interrupt, but surely you're Mrs. Vallance?'

Adela smiled brightly.

'Oh yes,' she said.

'I'm Hubert Flagg,' he continued. 'Leonore Adams said that if ever I saw you here I was to introduce myself.'

She said: 'And how did you know it was me?'

'Leonore said that you were very beautiful,' said Flagg seriously. 'When I saw you I knew that you must be the Mrs. Vallance.'

'I see,' she said. 'I think that's a very gallant speech. Won't you sit down?'

The subaltern looked at his wrist-watch. He said:

'By jove, I must be going. I'm on duty to-night, and it's past eight now.' He got up. 'Good-bye, Adela,' he said. 'See you again soon. I've loved talking to you.'

'So have I,' said Adela. 'I mean to say, it's been marvellous, hasn't it, talking about all those things— so interesting...'

The subaltern nodded to Flagg and went away. Flagg sat down in an armchair opposite Adela. He said:

'Leonore Adams said you were beautiful, but I didn't expect that you were going to look as wonderful as you do.'

Adela bridled. It was obvious that she liked flattery. Flagg thought she was not going to be too difficult.

She murmured archly: 'I can see Leonore has been talking about me. What else did she say? And could I have a gin and Italian, please?'

'Of course.' Flagg beckoned to the sleepy waiter and gave the order.

'It was because of what Leonore said that I wanted to talk to you,'

Flagg went on. 'She said you were an awfully interesting person as well as being a very beautiful one. She said you can talk intelligently about the war. I think the war is an absorbing topic'

'It's the topic,' said Adela. 'You know, I think it's awfully silly all this Government business about "Careless Talk Costs Lives". Just as if the repetition of anything one heard could possibly hurt anybody.

'Another thing, my opinion is that if everybody was to talk about all the wonderful inventions— just as much as they could— you'd have such a wave of super-optimism sweeping over everybody that the Fuehrer would probably throw his hand in.'

'I think you're right,' said Flagg seriously. 'I think it's quite stupid— this campaign of keeping quiet— trying to turn us all into a nation of dismal jimmies who simply keep quiet.'

He turned his wrist over casually so that he could see the time. He said:

'There are so few people who are interested in the things that matter. It's a pleasure to meet someone who is intelligent. The man I'm waiting for, for instance— he'd enthral you, Mrs. Vallance. He's travelled, cultured, good-looking, supremely intelligent. He's a Cuban.'

Adela said: 'What a wonderful person! I'd love to meet him. I think all South American men are so vital.-Most of the men one meets to-day are so ordinary, aren't they?'

'Look,' said Flagg, 'Santos D'Ianazzi is coming through the lounge now.'

She looked. Flagg noted with approval that she caught her breath.

D'Ianazzi came through the glass doors into the bar towards them. His shoulders were broad and his body tapered down to a thin waist and lean hips. His hair was black and waved beautifully. His face, tanned to a superb olive, was long and his chin was pointed with a dimple in the middle. His eyes were brown. He had thick black lashes. His forehead was broad and intelligent. He gave an impression of controlled strength, of agility both mental and physical. His clothes were perfect.

Flagg said: 'Santos, this is Mrs. Vallance— Mrs. Adela Vallance. She's a very intelligent person as well as being a very beautiful one. You two people ought to take to each other.'

D'Ianazzi said: 'I would like not'ing better than to talk for a long time to Mrs. Vallance. How unfortunate I came here to ta-alk beezness weeth you.'

Flagg said: 'You don't have to talk business with me. I've settled the business about that cigar shipment. I'll probably see you to-morrow. Can I drop you anywhere, Mrs. Vallance, or would you rather talk to Santos?'

D'Ianazzi said: 'If you take the so beautiful Mrs. Vallance away from me I promise you I will keel you at the first opportunity. I theenk she is the mos' wonderful thing I have ever seen in my life.'

Adela said: 'Mr. D'Ianazzi, you are as big a flatterer as Mr. Flagg. I mean to say I expect you say that to every woman you meet.'

D'Ianazzi said: I do not meet many women, señora.'

Flagg said: 'Well, I must go. Forgive me for running away, Mrs. Vallance. I'm looking forward to seeing you again.'

Adela said good-bye vaguely. Flagg could see that all her interest was for D'Ianazzi. He nodded to the Cuban, walked out of the bar, through the lounge, out into the street. He was smiling, showing his white teeth.

It was nine o'clock, Adela Vallance and Santos D'Ianazzi were sitting on the settee in the small bar at the Le Due. D'Ianazzi said softly:

'So really, Adela, you do-on't like theese war. You ha-ate it. Tha-at's why you ta-alk about it.' He smiled sympathetically. I know,' he said. 'It ees a sort of escape. You ha-ate it all so-o much, it frightens you so-o much, that the only thing you can do is to ta-alk about it all the time. Tha-at way you theenk you can do away weeth some of the fear.'

She said: I think you're right. All my friends think I am just sort of scatter-brained. Do you know,' she went on, fixing him with her blue eyes, 'do you know that they actually had me up at Scotland Yard and gave me a warning. They said I had been discussing one of the best kept secrets around every cocktail party in the West End. Well, I'm not that sort of person at all. You've guessed that?'

D'Ianazzi nodded.

'Of course, of course!' he said. 'The trouble weeth you is you are much too sensitive a person to be in theese atmosphere of the war the whole time. How I wish it were possible for you to get away from it.'

'I'd love to get away from it,' said Adela. Her voice changed. D'Ianazzi thought that for once she was actually speaking the truth. She went on: I don't think anybody's ever understood me before. Directly I met you I knew that you'd that thing that most South Americans have— an understanding of women.'

D'Ianazzi's face was very sympathetic. He said:

'I kno-ow. You are too sensitive for thees— too sweet. It ees a sha-ame that you should be here.'

'Well,' said Adela. 'What can I do? Where do I go? How does anyone escape?' She leaned forward, put her white slim hand on D'Ianazzi's knee. 'Where does one escape to?' she said.

D'Ianazzi said: 'You should live in Cuba. Cuba is sooch a beautiful country. There ees marvellous scenery, lovely theatres, beautiful flowers. The sunsets are so gorgeous they would ma-ake your heart ache. The sea ees always blue. No-obody ees ever bad-tempered.' He shrugged his shoulders and sighed. 'I'm homesick myself,' he said.

Adela sighed.

She said: I think I'd give two fingers off my right hand if I could go to Cuba.'

D'Ianazzi smiled at her. He looked straight into her eyes.

'You could go-o to Cuba if you wa-anted to. But first I theenk you ought to ha-ave a leetle drink. What you wa-ant is a champagne cocktail— a large one. Forgive me for a moment.'

He went to the bar. Adela could hear his soft voice with its delightful accent giving precise instructions to the bartender.

When he returned the waiter was just behind him with the tray. D'Ianazzi handed her a glass.

'Drink tha-at,' he said. 'You will feel so-o much better.'

Adela sipped the champagne cocktail. She said:

'I think you're awfully funny. I mean to say, you say the strangest things, don't you? You said I could go to Cuba. Tell me how I can go to Cuba.'

D'Ianazzi said: 'It ees quite simple. I will tell you now.'

He began to talk to her. His voice was very low, very soft. Adela was feeling pleasantly odd. She thought, possibly it was the effect of the champagne— plus Santos. She listened attentively. A strange feeling of well-being permeated her mind. The war which she feared was beginning to recede into the background.

He said: 'You mus' understand tha-at in Cuba there ees a great friend of mine. Well, a couple of years ago he had a leetle trouble with his wife and she went awa-ay. She went to Paris. My friend wanted to get a divorce but he could not beca-ause he did not know ahythk g about her— where she was or wha-at she was doing. It ha-as always been an understood thing between heem and me that if ever I should co-ome across her I would let heem know.

'Well, I have co-ome across her. I've found out all about her. I've got all the evidence tha-at my friend wa-ants. Now the theeng ees to get it to heem. You see, I'm not going ba-ack to Cuba for another six mont's. That's a lo-ong time to waste.' He smiled. 'Especially when one wa-ants to marry somebody else as my friend does.'

I see,' said Adela. 'You want somebody to take the evidence back by hand?'

D'Ianazzi nodded.

'Well, it's a delightful idea,' said Adela. 'I'd love to do it. But you're not seriously suggesting, Santos, that I go to Cuba merely to carry a letter

containing legal evidence to your friend? What should I live on while I was in Cuba?'

D'Ianazzi nodded.

'Tha-at would be all right,' he said. 'As a matter of fact, my friend would have a first-class job for you in Cuba. He ees a man of importance. He would look after you.'

He looked at her quizzically.

'Do you mean to tell me', he said, 'that eef it wa-as arranged that there would be a nice position for you in Cuba and you ha-ad not to worry about money— do you mean to say tha-at you would go?'

Adela swallowed hard. Then she said with a little gulp: 'Yes, I would!'

'All right,' he said. 'Then it ees settled, Adela. Leesten! First of all about the money thing...'

He put his hand into his outside jacket pocket and produced a leather case. He opened it. Adela saw in the case, nestling against a white velvet background, one of the most superb diamond bracelets she had ever seen in her life.

D'Ianazzi said: 'You can ta-ake that bracelet with you. You ca-an wear it. When you get to Cuba anybody will give you the equivalent of about seven t'ousand pounds for it. After you ha-ave seen my friend and given heem the letter which I shall give you, he will arrange a ver' nice job for you— something not deeficult— something that ees well paid.'

Adela nodded. She felt almost hypnotized. 'I see,' she said. 'And when do I go?'

'The day after to-morrow,' said D'Ianazzi, still smiling. 'There ees a bo-oat leaves tha-at day. I ha-ave friends here and I ca-an let you ha-ave a passport. So-o all you ha-ave to do is to be ready to leave the day after to-morrow. Can you do tha-at?'

'Yes,' said Adela triumphantly, 'I can.'

'Well, tha-at ees all settled,' he said. He produced a notebook. 'Will you write down your address?'

Adela took the pencil, wrote down her name and address. She handed the book back to D'Ianazzi. He said:

'I'm going to give you the letter and the bracelet now. I am doing that because I shall not be seeing you again. Some time to-morrow evening I shall send you round your passport and your steamship ticket and a letter of introduction to my friend.' He showed his white teeth in a smile. 'Isn't it marvellous to be going to Cuba?'

'Wonderful,' sighed Adela.

D'Ianazzi put his hand in the left side pocket of his jacket. He produced a thick heavily-sealed manilla envelope. It was addressed to Señor Enrico Faragos at an address in Havana. He handed it to Adela.

'Now there ees the letter with the evidence in it for my friend. I'm going to ask you to be ver' careful and not lose it.'

'You needn't worry,' said Adela. 'I shan't lose it.'

'There ees only one other thing,' said D'Ianazzi. I don' theenk it would be a good theeng if you were to tell your friends that you were going off suddenly to Cuba. I would ha-ate anything to turn up to stop you going.'

'You needn't worry about that,' said Adela. 'I'll be as silent as the grave.'

D'Ianazzi got up. He said:

'Thees has been wonderful. One of those sudden, unexpected and quite delightful meetings that end in a marvellous adventure. When I come ba-ack to Cuba in six mont's' time, I shall find you settled there and 'appy and comfortable. And then you and I mus' dine together and ta-alk about a-all the theengs we have not had time to ta-alk about now.'

'Yes,' said Adela. 'That will be wonderful, won't it?'

D'Ianazzi held out his hand. When Adela put hers into it he carried her fingers gracefully to his lips.

He said: '*Adiós, señora*.' He went away.

She watched him walk across the lounge and disappear. Her heart was pounding violently. She was almost gasping with excitement. After a few minutes she got up. She walked quickly out of the bar, along the passage and into the telephone booth. She dialled a Park number, gave a little gasp of relief when Jimmie Daynor's voice said: 'Hallo!'

Adela said breathlessly: 'This is Adela. Listen, Jimmie, you've often told me I was a fool. Everybody's told me that I talk too much, that I can't keep quiet—that I'm a menace. All right. Well, I've done something that all you clever people couldn't do.'

Daynor said casually: 'Well, you seem fearfully excited about it, Adela. What have you done now?'

'This evening', said Adela, I met a Cuban. His name's Santos D'Ianazzi. He was introduced to me by a man called Flagg, who seems to know Leonore Adams.'

'Go on, Adela. I'm all ears,' said Daynor.

'Well,' said Adela with a gulp, 'the Cuban was most interesting. I told him I was fed up and bored with everything, and he said I ought to go to Cuba. He said I could go to Cuba. When I asked him how, he told me that if I took an envelope he's given to me with some papers inside it to a friend of his in Cuba, he'd arrange my passage; arrange, for me to have a job there. He's even given

me a most wonderful! diamond bracelet so that I should have money when I got there. I ask you!'

Daynor whistled softly.

'It certainly sounds odd,' he said. 'You think he's a spy or something, do you?'

'I'm certain of it,' said Adela. 'I sensed it immediately. You can take it from me that there are plans or something in this envelope. He knows jolly well it's got to be delivered by hand, and he thinks I'm fool enough to do it. What ought I to do, Jimmie?'

Daynor said: 'Just get into a taxi-cab and come over here. Bring the envelope with you.'

'All right,' said Adela. 'I'll do that. I'll come at once. Isn't it exciting?. I mean to say it's too exciting, isn't it?'

IT WAS half-past ten when Adela arrived at Daynor's apartment Her fingers, tightly clasping D'Ianazzi's thick envelope, were trembling..

Daynor opened the door. The sight of his broad honest smiling face comforted Adela.

He said: 'So you've arrived, carrying the secret plans with you! Come in, my dear.'

He stood aside while Adela walked across the cool hallway into the sitting-room beyond.

She said: 'Well, you can laugh at me if you like, Jimmie, but there is something very odd about this business.'

'Maybe,' said Daynor. 'Help yourself to a cigarette, Adela, and let me look at this mysterious envelope.'

She gave him the envelope. He slit one end of it, pulled out the packet of papers.

After a minute he said: 'My god!'

Adela, in the action of lighting a cigarette, looked up.

'Well, what is it, Jimmie?' she asked.

'This beats everything,' said Daynor. 'You were dead right. This is one half of a set of plans of a new Bofors gun they are making here. By jove, Adela, you really have pulled one this time. You'll probably get an O.B.E. for this.'

Adela said: 'Well, there you are. So I'm not such a fool after all, am I, Jimmie?'

'On this occasion you certainly are not,' he said.

He stood, the papers in his hands, looking out of the window, thinking.

'What ought I'to do, Jimmie?' said Adela.

'Don't worry,' he replied. 'Leave those papers with me. I'll look after this business from now on, Adela. Now tell me exactly what happened to-night.'

She told him. He listened attentively. Eventually, when she had finished, he said:

'Well, all you have to do is to go quietly home and wait the arrival of your passport and the rest of the stuff. Whoever brings these things round to your place will be working with D'Ianazzi. The police will have that gentleman taken care of and I expect he'll tell the whole truth to save his skin.'

Adela said: 'I suppose you'll see the police at once about this, Jimmie?'

Daynor said: 'Don't worry, my dear. I'll see that Mr. Santos D'Ianazzi is taken care of.'

Adela sighed.

'It's been a marvellous adventure,' she said. 'I shall have something to talk about for the rest of my life.'

The doorbell rang. Daynor went into the hallway and opened the door. After a few seconds, Adela, her eyes wide, saw him as he backed into the sitting-room with both hands held above his head. Over his shoulder she could see the smiling face of Santos D'Ianazzi and, behind, the saturnine Flagg.

D'Ianazzi said: 'I'm so-o sorry to be such a nuisance, Adela. But you see we are not such fools as you theenk. We knew Mr. Daynor was a friend of yours and we knew that eef you ca-ame here to heem immediately after I had left you, you were not going to play square with us. We thought tha-at you might like to ta-alk too much to Mr. Daynor.' He looked at the table on which the opened envelope and the papers lay. 'We were right,' he said.

Flagg shut the door. Daynor, his hands still in the air, was standing in front of the fireplace. D'Ianazzi, smiling, stood in the centre of the room, an automatic pistol levelled at Daynor.

Adela sat where she was and gasped.

Daynor said: 'You can't get away with this sort of business in this country, D'Ianazzi.'

The Cuban grinned.

'Mr. Daynor,' he said, 'you'd be surprised. Shall I tell you wha-at we are going to do?'

'I'd like to hear,' said Daynor evenly. D'Ianazzi shrugged his shoulders.

'It ees mos' unfortunate for you and the beautiful Adela,' he said pleasantly. 'You see, we ha-ave to get tho-ose papers out of the country quickly, which ees not so-o easy. These Engleesh are not such fools as people theenk. Well, Adela looked like a good chance, but I wa-as not quite certain, so-o we waited to see wha-at she would do. It ees mos' unfortunate for you.'

Daynor asked why. D'Ianazzi said:

'We ha-ave got to keel you— bo-oth of you.' He turned to Flagg: 'Hubert, ta-ake Adela away. Ta-ake her into the next room or somewhere while I fineesh our friend here.' He was smiling. Adela opened her mouth to shriek, but before the sound came Flagg hit her across the mouth. He led her out of the room. Adela went quietly.

D'Ianazzi looked at Daynor. Daynor began to speak, the words tumbling out of his mouth. He said:

'You can't get away with this. They'll get you in no time. You must be mad.'

D'Ianazzi said: 'On the co-ontrary I am ver' sane. They'll certainly get us eef we don't deal with you and the beautiful Adela. So-o we are going to do it.'

Daynor gulped. He said:

'You'd better listen for a minute. You're working for U.A.I, aren't you? If you were after the plans of that Bofors gun I'll bet any money you like that Schnimnel is your boss.'

D'Ianazzi whistled softly through his teeth. He dropped the barrel of the gun. He said:

'Theese ees mos' interesting. Go on.'

Daynor relaxed. He said:

'Well, what's the odds? I've been working for Schnimnel for three years. I know how badly they want those plans. The joke is I've got the first half of 'em. I thought they might be able to reconstruct the second half with what I've got. I was getting out with it to-morrow. My passage to Portugal is arranged.'

D'Ianazzi said: 'Theese ees what you call a scream! Theese ees the thing that happens once in a million years. All right! I'm going to believe you eef you can prove it.'

Daynor went to the writing desk by the window and brought out a packet of papers. They were the first half of the plans. Underneath them was a code book. He handed them both to D'Ianazzi.

D'Ianazzi said: 'That ees good enough. So-o you're the man that Schnimnel used to call Johnnie?'

Daynor said: 'That's right.'

D'Ianazzi went on: 'Theese ees lucky. You can go to Portugal and you can ta-ake all the papers with you.'

'All right,' said Daynor. 'But what about Adela?'

D'Ianazzi said: 'Adela has go-ot to die. She knows too much. We'll tell her tha-at the whole thing was a jo-oke to try and stop her ta-alking. We'll let her go now but we'll keel her later to-night. I theenk you have been ver' clever being such a good friend of Adela.'

Daynor said: 'You bet I have. The information I have got from that woman is nobody's business.'

D'Ianazzi said: 'All right!' He called out: 'Hubert, bring Adela in.' Flagg came in. He was still holding Adela.

D'Ianazzi said: 'It ees a sha-ame that we ha-ave frightened our poor Adela so much. Let her go, Hubert, the jo-oke's over.' Flagg got it. He grinned happily.

Daynor said: 'Sorry about this, Adela. This is all my fault. I thought it was time that someone taught you a lesson. I'm sorry if we've frightened you. Maybe you'll remember this.'

Adela said: 'You beast, Jimmie. Oh, you beast! I'll never forgive you for this. You gave me a terrible shock. You've made a fool of me.' She looked at D'Ianazzi. She said: 'And I hate you!'

D'Ianazzi said: 'Not really— just for the moment. Pliz to give me ba-ack the bracelet I ga-ave you, eef you don't mind.'

Adela fumbled in her handbag. She found the bracelet, handed it to D'Ianazzi. Then she walked out of the flat. The hall door slammed behind her.

Flagg said: 'What's the idea?'

D'Ianazzi grinned.

'Would you believe it?' he said. 'Hubert, theese ees Johnnie. Schnimnel thought a lo-ot of Johnnie. The other jo-oke ees he's got the first half of the Bofors plans. He ees taking the lot to Portugal to-morrow. Johnnie's no fool.'

Flagg said: 'Well, I'll be damned. What a break!'

D'Ianazzi lit a cigarette. He inhaled the tobacco smoke slowly. He said:

'You've got to ta-ake care of that woman Adela, Hubert. You'll have to feex her some time to-night. She ees dangerous— she ta-alks too much.'

Flagg said: 'I'll fix her.'

D'Ianazzi said: 'So long as you let me know to-morrow that Adela's been ta-aken care of. That ees all I wa-ant to know. Well, good night, Johnnie. Nice journey to you.'

He went out of the flat, Flagg at his heels. When the front door closed quietly behind them Daynor fit a cigarette, stood in front of the fireplace smiling.

ACROSS the road was a telephone box. D'Ianazzi went inside. He dialled a Whitehall number. After a moment he spoke. Strangely enough he spoke perfect English. There was no trace of a Cuban accent. He said:

'Good evening, sir. This is Dizzy speaking. It came off. We got at Daynor through Adela Vallance. We pulled that stunt on him that we arranged. He talked. He's got the complete set of Bofors plans and he thinks he's going to Portugal to-morrow to deliver them...'

He listened while the voice at the other end spoke, then he hung up. He came out of the telephone box into the cool night air. He said:

'Well, Hubert, it came off, didn't it?'

Flagg said: 'Daynor must be chortling. I suppose they'll shoot him within the next fortnight.'

'Probably sooner than that,' said D'Ianazzi, whose name was Jones. 'It's a lovely night, isn't it, Hubert?'.

They began to walk towards Knightsbridge.

Adela Vallance swallowed two aspirin tablets, drank a little water. She leaned out of bed, picked up the telephone from the bedside table. She rang a number. She said:

'Is that you, Leonore? Well, I've got something absolutely amazing to tell you. I'd never believe that a man could be so unkind; I have had the most fearful joke played on me and by the last person in the world— Jimmie Daynor. You'll never believe it when I tell you. I mean to say— listen to this....'

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22: The Inn of the Two Witches

A Find

Joseph Conrad

1857-1924

The Pall Mall Magazine March 1913

Teodor Josef Konrad Korzeniowski

THIS TALE, episode, experience— call it how you will— was related in the fifties of the last century by a man who, by his own confession, was sixty years old at the time. Sixty is not a bad age— unless in perspective, when no doubt it is contemplated by the majority of us with mixed feelings. It is a calm age; the game is practically over by then; and standing aside one begins to remember with a certain vividness what a fine fellow one used to be. I have observed that, by an amiable attention of Providence, most people at sixty begin to take a romantic view of themselves. Their very failures exhale a charm of peculiar potency. And indeed the hopes of the future are a fine company to live with, exquisite forms, fascinating if you like, but— so to speak— naked, stripped for a run. The robes of glamour are luckily the property of the immovable past which, without them, would sit, a shivery sort of thing, under the gathering shadows.

I suppose it was the romanticism of growing age which set our man to relate his experience for his own satisfaction or for the wonder of his posterity. It could not have been for his glory, because the experience was simply that of an abominable fright— terror he calls it. You would have guessed that the relation alluded to in the very first lines was in writing.

This writing constitutes the Find declared in the sub-title. The title itself is my own contrivance (can't call it invention), and has the merit of veracity. We will be concerned with an inn here. As to the witches that's merely a

conventional expression, and we must take our man's word for it that it fits the case.

The Find was made in a box of books bought in London, in a street which no longer exists, from a second-hand bookseller in the last stage of decay. As to the books themselves they were at least twentieth-hand, and on inspection turned out not worth the very small sum of money I disbursed. It might have been some premonition of that fact which made me say: "But I must have the box too." The decayed bookseller assented by the careless, tragic gesture of a man already doomed to extinction.

A litter of loose pages at the bottom of the box excited my curiosity but faintly. The close, neat, regular handwriting was not attractive at first sight. But in one place the statement that in a.d. 1813 the writer was twenty-two years old caught my eye. Two and twenty is an interesting age in which one is easily reckless and easily frightened; the faculty of reflection being weak and the power of imagination strong.

In another place the phrase: "At night we stood in again," arrested my languid attention, because it was a sea phrase. "Let's see what it is all about," I thought, without excitement.

Oh! but it was a dull-faced MS., each line resembling every other line in their close-set and regular order. It was like the drone of a monotonous voice. A treatise on sugar-refining (the dreariest subject I can think of) could have been given a more lively appearance. "In a.d. 1813, I was twenty-two years old," he begins earnestly and goes on with every appearance of calm, horrible industry. Don't imagine, however, that there is anything archaic in my find. Diabolic ingenuity in invention though as old as the world is by no means a lost art. Look at the telephones for shattering the little peace of mind given to us in this world, or at the machine guns for letting with dispatch life out of our bodies. Now-a-days any blear-eyed old witch if only strong enough to turn an insignificant little handle could lay low a hundred young men of twenty in the twinkling of an eye.

If this isn't progress! … Why immense! We have moved on, and so you must expect to meet here a certain naiveness of contrivance and simplicity of aim appertaining to the remote epoch. And of course no motoring tourist can hope to find such an inn anywhere, now. This one, the one of the title, was situated in Spain. That much I discovered only from internal evidence, because a good many pages of that relation were missing— perhaps not a great misfortune after all. The writer seemed to have entered into a most elaborate detail of the why and wherefore of his presence on that coast— presumably the north coast of Spain. His experience has nothing to do with the sea, though. As far as I can make it out, he was an officer on board a sloop-of-war.

There's nothing strange in that. At all stages of the long Peninsular campaign many of our men-of-war of the smaller kind were cruising off the north coast of Spain— as risky and disagreeable a station as can be well imagined.

It looks as though that ship of his had had some special service to perform. A careful explanation of all the circumstances was to be expected from our man, only, as I've said, some of his pages (good tough paper too) were missing: gone in covers for jampots or in wadding for the fowling-pieces of his irreverent posterity. But it is to be seen clearly that communication with the shore and even the sending of messengers inland was part of her service, either to obtain intelligence from or to transmit orders or advice to patriotic Spaniards, guerilleros or secret juntas of the province. Something of the sort. All this can be only inferred from the preserved scraps of his conscientious writing.

Next we come upon the panegyric of a very fine sailor, a member of the ship's company, having the rating of the captain's coxswain. He was known on board as Cuba Tom; not because he was Cuban however; he was indeed the best type of a genuine British tar of that time, and a man-of-war's man for years. He came by the name on account of some wonderful adventures he had in that island in his young days, adventures which were the favourite subject of the yarns he was in the habit of spinning to his shipmates of an evening on the forecastle head. He was intelligent, very strong, and of proved courage. Incidentally we are told, so exact is our narrator, that Tom had the finest pigtail for thickness and length of any man in the Navy. This appendage, much cared for and sheathed tightly in a porpoise skin, hung half way down his broad back to the great admiration of all beholders and to the great envy of some.

Our young officer dwells on the manly qualities of Cuba Tom with something like affection. This sort of relation between officer and man was not then very rare. A youngster on joining the service was put under the charge of a trustworthy seaman, who slung his first hammock for him and often later on became a sort of humble friend to the junior officer. The narrator on joining the sloop had found this man on board after some years of separation. There is something touching in the warm pleasure he remembers and records at this meeting with the professional mentor of his boyhood.

We discover then that, no Spaniard being forthcoming for the service, this worthy seaman with the unique pigtail and a very high character for courage and steadiness had been selected as messenger for one of these missions inland which have been mentioned. His preparations were not elaborate. One gloomy autumn morning the sloop ran close to a shallow cove where a landing could be made on that iron-bound shore. A boat was lowered, and pulled in with Tom Corbin (Cuba Tom) perched in the bow, and our young man (Mr.

Edgar Byrne was his name on this earth which knows him no more) sitting in the stern sheets.

A few inhabitants of a hamlet, whose grey stone houses could be seen a hundred yards or so up a deep ravine, had come down to the shore and watched the approach of the boat. The two Englishmen leaped ashore. Either from dullness or astonishment the peasants gave no greeting, and only fell back in silence.

Mr. Byrne had made up his mind to see Tom Corbin started fairly on his way. He looked round at the heavy surprised faces.

"There isn't much to get out of them," he said. "Let us walk up to the village. There will be a wine shop for sure where we may find somebody more promising to talk to and get some information from."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Tom falling into step behind his officer. "A bit of palaver as to courses and distances can do no harm; I crossed the broadest part of Cuba by the help of my tongue tho' knowing far less Spanish than I do now. As they say themselves it was 'four words and no more' with me, that time when I got left behind on shore by theBlanche, frigate."

He made light of what was before him, which was but a day's journey into the mountains. It is true that there was a full day's journey before striking the mountain path, but that was nothing for a man who had crossed the island of Cuba on his two legs, and with no more than four words of the language to begin with.

The officer and the man were walking now on a thick sodden bed of dead leaves, which the peasants thereabouts accumulate in the streets of their villages to rot during the winter for field manure. Turning his head Mr. Byrne perceived that the whole male population of the hamlet was following them on the noiseless springy carpet. Women stared from the doors of the houses and the children had apparently gone into hiding. The village knew the ship by sight, afar off, but no stranger had landed on that spot perhaps for a hundred years or more. The cocked hat of Mr. Byrne, the bushy whiskers and the enormous pigtail of the sailor, filled them with mute wonder. They pressed behind the two Englishmen staring like those islanders discovered by Captain Cook in the South Seas.

It was then that Byrne had his first glimpse of the little cloaked man in a yellow hat. Faded and dingy as it was, this covering for his head made him noticeable.

The entrance to the wine shop was like a rough hole in a wall of flints. The owner was the only person who was not in the street, for he came out from the darkness at the back where the inflated forms of wine skins hung on nails could be vaguely distinguished. He was a tall, one-eyed Asturian with scrubby,

hollow cheeks; a grave expressionof countenance contrasted enigmatically with the roaming restlessness of his solitary eye. On learning that the matter in hand was the sending on his way of that English mariner toward a certain Gonzales in the mountains, he closed his good eye for a moment as if in meditation. Then opened it, very lively again.

"Possibly, possibly. It could be done."

A friendly murmur arose in the group in the doorway at the name of Gonzales, the local leader against the French. Inquiring as to the safety of the road Byrne was glad to learn that no troops of that nation had been seen in the neighbourhood for months. Not the smallest little detachment of these impious polizones. While giving these answers the owner of the wine-shop busied himself in drawing into an earthenware jug some wine which he set before the heretic English, pocketing with grave abstraction the small piece of money the officer threw upon the table in recognition of the unwritten law that none may enter a wine-shop without buying drink. His eye was in constant motion as if it were trying to do the work of the two; but when Byrne made inquiries as to the possibility of hiring a mule, it became immovably fixed in the direction of the door which was closely besieged by the curious. In front of them, just within the threshold, the little man in the large cloak and yellow hat had taken his stand. He was a diminutive person, a mere homunculus, Byrne describes him, in a ridiculously mysterious, yet assertive attitude, a corner of his cloak thrown cavalierly over his left shoulder, muffling his chin and mouth; while the broad-brimmed yellow hat hung on a corner of his square little head. He stood there taking snuff, repeatedly.

"A mule," repeated the wine-seller, his eyes fixed on that quaint and snuffy figure…. "No, señor officer! Decidedly no mule is to be got in this poor place."

The coxswain, who stood by with the true sailor's air of unconcern in strange surroundings, struck in quietly—

"If your honour will believe me Shank's pony's the best for this job. I would have to leave the beast somewhere, anyhow, since the captain has told me that half my way will be along paths fit only for goats."

The diminutive man made a step forward, and speaking through the folds of the cloak which seemed to muffle a sarcastic intention—

"Si, señor. They are too honest in this village to have a single mule amongst them for your worship's service. To that I can bear testimony. In these times it's only rogues or very clever men who can manage to have mules or any other four-footed beasts and the wherewithal to keep them. But what this valiant mariner wants is a guide; and here, señor, behold my brother-in-law, Bernardino, wine-seller, and alcade of this most Christian and hospitable village, who will find you one."

This, Mr. Byrne says in his relation, was the only thing to do. A youth in a ragged coat and goat-skin breeches was produced after some more talk. The English officer stood treat to the whole village, and while the peasants drank he and Cuba Tom took their departure accompanied by the guide. The diminutive man in the cloak had disappeared.

Byrne went along with the coxswain out of the village. He wanted to see him fairly on his way; and he would have gone a greater distance, if the seaman had not suggested respectfully the advisability of return so as not to keep the ship a moment longer than necessary so close in with the shore on such an unpromising looking morning. A wild gloomy sky hung over their heads when they took leave of each other, and their surroundings of rank bushes and stony fields were dreary.

"In four days' time," were Byrne's last words, "the ship will stand in and send a boat on shore if the weather permits. If not you'll have to make it out on shore the best you can till we come along to take you off."

"Right you are, sir," answered Tom, and strode on. Byrne watched him step out on a narrow path. In a thick pea-jacket with a pair of pistols in his belt, a cutlass by his side, and a stout cudgel in his hand, he looked a sturdy figure and well able to take care of himself. He turned round for a moment to wave his hand, giving to Byrne one more view of his honest bronzed face with bushy whiskers. The lad in goatskin breeches looking, Byrne says, like a faun or a young satyr leaping ahead, stopped to wait for him, and then went off at a bound. Both disappeared.

Byrne turned back. The hamlet was hidden in a fold of the ground, and the spot seemed the most lonely corner of the earth and as if accursed in its uninhabited desolate barrenness. Before he had walked many yards, there appeared very suddenly from behind a bush the muffled up diminutive Spaniard. Naturally Byrne stopped short.

The other made a mysterious gesture with a tiny hand peeping from under his cloak. His hat hung very much at the side of his head. "Señor," he said without any preliminaries. "Caution! It is a positive fact that one-eyed Bernardino, my brother-in-law, has at this moment a mule in his stable. And why he who is not clever has a mule there? Because he is a rogue; a man without conscience. Because I had to give up the *macho* to him to secure for myself a roof to sleep under and a mouthful of *olla* to keep my soul in this insignificant body of mine. Yet, señor, it contains a heart many times bigger than the mean thing which beats in the breast of that brute connection of mine of which I am ashamed, though I opposed that marriage with all my power. Well, the misguided woman suffered enough. She had her purgatory on this earth— God rest her soul."

Byrne says he was so astonished by the sudden appearance of that sprite-like being, and by the sardonic bitterness of the speech, that he was unable to disentangle the significant fact from what seemed but a piece of family history fired out at him without rhyme or reason. Not at first. He was confounded and at the same time he was impressed by the rapid forcible delivery, quite different from the frothy excited loquacity of an Italian. So he stared while the homunculus, letting his cloak fall about him, aspired an immense quantity of snuff out of the hollow of his palm.

"A mule," exclaimed Byrne seizing at last the real aspect of the discourse. "You say he has got a mule? That's queer! Why did he refuse to let me have it?"

The diminutive Spaniard muffled himself up again with great dignity.

"*Quién sabe*," he said coldly, with a shrug of his draped shoulders. "He is a great *politico* in everything he does. But one thing your worship may be certain of— that his intentions are always rascally. This husband of my *defunta* sister ought to have been married a long time ago to the widow with the wooden legs." *

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** The gallows, supposed to be widowed of the last executed criminal and waiting for another.*

"I see. But remember that, whatever your motives, your worship countenanced him in this lie."

The bright unhappy eyes on each side of a predatory nose confronted Byrne without wincing, while with that testiness which lurks so often at the bottom of Spanish dignity—

"No doubt the señor officer would not lose an ounce of blood if I were stuck under the fifth rib," he retorted. "But what of this poor sinner here?" Then changing his tone. "Señor, by the necessities of the times I live here in exile, a Castilian and an old Christian, existing miserably in the midst of these brute Asturians, and dependent on the worst of them all, who has less conscience and scruples than a wolf. And being a man of intelligence I govern myself accordingly. Yet I can hardly contain my scorn. You have heard the way I spoke. A caballero of parts like your worship might have guessed that there was a cat in there."

"What cat?" said Byrne uneasily. "Oh, I see. Something suspicious. No, señor. I guessed nothing. My nation are not good guessers at that sort of thing; and, therefore, I ask you plainly whether that wine-seller has spoken the truth in other particulars?"

"There are certainly no Frenchmen anywhere about," said the little man with a return to his indifferent manner.

"Or robbers— ladrones?"

"*Ladrones en grande*— no! Assuredly not," was the answer in a cold philosophical tone. "What is there left for them to do after the French? And nobody travels in these times. But who can say! Opportunity makes the robber. Still that mariner of yours has a fierce aspect, and with the son of a cat rats will have no play. But there is a saying, too, that where honey is there will soon be flies."

This oracular discourse exasperated Byrne. "In the name of God," he cried, "tell me plainly if you think my man is reasonably safe on his journey."

The homunculus, undergoing one of his rapid changes, seized the officer's arm. The grip of his little hand was astonishing.

"Señor! Bernardino had taken notice of him. What more do you want? And listen— men *have* disappeared on this road— on a certain portion of this road, when Bernardino kept a *meson*, an inn, and I, his brother-in-law, had coaches and mules for hire. Now there are no travellers, no coaches. The French have ruined me. Bernardino has retired here for reasons of his own after my sister died. They were three to torment the life out of her, he and Erminia and Lucilla, two aunts of his— all affiliated to the devil. And now he has robbed me of my last mule. You are an armed man. Demand the *macho* from him, with a pistol to his head, señor— it is not his, I tell you— and ride after your man who is so precious to you. And then you shall both be safe, for no two travellers have been ever known to disappear together in those days. As to the beast, I, its owner, I confide it to your honour."

They were staring hard at each other, and Byrne nearly burst into a laugh at the ingenuity and transparency of the little man's plot to regain possession of his mule. But he had no difficulty to keep a straight face because he felt deep within himself a strange inclination to do that very extraordinary thing. He did not laugh, but his lip quivered; at which the diminutive Spaniard, detaching his black glittering eyes from Byrne's face, turned his back on him brusquely with a gesture and a fling of the cloak which somehow expressed contempt, bitterness, and discouragement all at once. He turned away and stood still, his hat aslant, muffled up to the ears. But he was not offended to the point of refusing the silver *duro* which Byrne offered him with a non-committal speech as if nothing extraordinary had passed between them.

"I must make haste on board now," said Byrne, then.

"*Vaya usted con Dios*," muttered the gnome. And this interview ended with a sarcastic low sweep of the hat which was replaced at the same perilous angle as before.

Directly the boat had been hoisted the ship's sails were filled on the off-shore tack, and Byrne imparted the whole story to his captain, who was but a

very few years older than himself. There was some amused indignation at it— but while they laughed they looked gravely at each other. A Spanish dwarf trying to beguile an officer of his majesty's navy into stealing a mule for him— that was too funny, too ridiculous, too incredible. Those were the exclamations of the captain. He couldn't get over the grotesqueness of it.

"Incredible. That's just it," murmured Byrne at last in a significant tone.

They exchanged a long stare. "It's as clear as daylight," affirmed the captain impatiently, because in his heart he was not certain. And Tom the best seaman in the ship for one, the good-humouredly deferential friend of his boyhood for the other, was becoming endowed with a compelling fascination, like a symbolic figure of loyalty appealing to their feelings and their conscience, so that they could not detach their thoughts from his safety. Several times they went up on deck, only to look at the coast, as if it could tell them something of his fate. It stretched away, lengthening in the distance, mute, naked, and savage, veiled now and then by the slanting cold shafts of rain. The westerly swell rolled its interminable angry lines of foam and big dark clouds flew over the ship in a sinister procession.

"I wish to goodness you had done what your little friend in the yellow hat wanted you to do," said the commander of the sloop late in the afternoon with visible exasperation.

"Do you, sir?" answered Byrne, bitter with positive anguish. "I wonder what you would have said afterwards? Why! I might have been kicked out of the service for looting a mule from a nation in alliance with His Majesty. Or I might have been battered to a pulp with flails and pitch-forks— a pretty tale to get abroad about one of your officers— while trying to steal a mule. Or chased ignominiously to the boat— for you would not have *expected* me to shoot down unoffending people for the sake of a mangy mule…. And yet," he added in a low voice, "I almost wish myself I had done it."

Before dark those two young men had worked themselves up into a highly complex psychological state of scornful scepticism and alarmed credulity. It tormented them exceedingly; and the thought that it would have to last for six days at least, and possibly be prolonged further for an indefinite time, was not to be borne. The ship was therefore put on the inshore tack at dark. All through the gusty dark night she went towards the land to look for her man, at times lying over in the heavy puffs, at others rolling idle in the swell, nearly stationary, as if she too had a mind of her own to swing perplexed between cool reason and warm impulse.

Then just at daybreak a boat put off from her and went on tossed by the seas towards the shallow cove where, with considerable difficulty, an officer in a thick coat and a round hat managed to land on a strip of shingle.

"It was my wish," writes Mr. Byrne, "a wish of which my captain approved, to land secretly if possible. I did not want to be seen either by my aggrieved friend in the yellow hat, whose motives were not clear, or by the one-eyed wine-seller, who may or may not have been affiliated to the devil, or indeed by any other dweller in that primitive village. But unfortunately the cove was the only possible landing place for miles; and from the steepness of the ravine I couldn't make a circuit to avoid the houses."

"Fortunately," he goes on, "all the people were yet in their beds. It was barely daylight when I found myself walking on the thick layer of sodden leaves filling the only street. No soul was stirring abroad, no dog barked. The silence was profound, and I had concluded with some wonder that apparently no dogs were kept in the hamlet, when I heard a low snarl, and from a noisome alley between two hovels emerged a vile cur with its tail between its legs. He slunk off silently showing me his teeth as he ran before me, and he disappeared so suddenly that he might have been the unclean incarnation of the Evil One. There was, too, something so weird in the manner of its coming and vanishing, that my spirits, already by no means very high, became further depressed by the revolting sight of this creature as if by an unlucky presage."

He got away from the coast unobserved, as far as he knew, then struggled manfully to the west against wind and rain, on a barren dark upland, under a sky of ashes. Far away the harsh and desolate mountains raising their scarped and denuded ridges seemed to wait for him menacingly. The evening found him fairly near to them, but, in sailor language, uncertain of his position, hungry, wet, and tired out by a day of steady tramping over broken ground during which he had seen very few people, and had been unable to obtain the slightest intelligence of Tom Corbin's passage. "On! on! I must push on," he had been saying to himself through the hours of solitary effort, spurred more by incertitude than by any definite fear or definite hope.

The lowering daylight died out quickly, leaving him faced by a broken bridge. He descended into the ravine, forded a narrow stream by the last gleam of rapid water, and clambering out on the other side was met by the night which fell like a bandage over his eyes. The wind sweeping in the darkness the broadside of the sierra worried his ears by a continuous roaring noise as of a maddened sea. He suspected that he had lost the road. Even in daylight, with its ruts and mud-holes and ledges of outcropping stone, it was difficult to distinguish from the dreary waste of the moor interpersed with boulders and clumps of naked bushes. But, as he says, "he steered his course by the feel of the wind," his hat rammed low on his brow, his head down, stopping now and again from mere weariness of mind rather than of body— as

if not his strength but his resolution were being overtaxed by the strain of endeavour half suspected to be vain, and by the unrest of his feelings.

In one of these pauses borne in the wind faintly as if from very far away he heard a sound of knocking, just knocking on wood. He noticed that the wind had lulled suddenly.

His heart started beating tumultuously because in himself he carried the impression of the desert solitudes he had been traversing for the last six hours— the oppressive sense of an uninhabited world. When he raised his head a gleam of light, illusory as it often happens in dense darkness, swam before his eyes. While he peered, the sound of feeble knocking was repeated— and suddenly he felt rather than saw the existence of a massive obstacle in his path. What was it? The spur of a hill? Or was it a house! Yes. It was a house right close, as though it had risen from the ground or had come gliding to meet him, dumb and pallid, from some dark recess of the night. It towered loftily. He had come up under its lee; another three steps and he could have touched the wall with his hand. It was no doubt a *posada* and some other traveller was trying for admittance. He heard again the sound of cautious knocking.

Next moment a broad band of light fell into the night through the opened door. Byrne stepped eagerly into it, whereupon the person outside leaped with a stifled cry away into the night. An exclamation of surprise was heard too, from within. Byrne, flinging himself against the half closed door, forced his way in against some considerable resistance.

A miserable candle, a mere rushlight, burned at the end of a long deal table. And in its light Byrne saw, staggering yet, the girl he had driven from the door. She had a short black skirt, an orange shawl, a dark complexion— and the escaped single hairs from the mass, sombre and thick like a forest and held up by a comb, made a black mist about her low forehead. A shrill lamentable howl of: "*Misericordia*!" came in two voices from the further end of the long room, where the fire-light of an open hearth played between heavy shadows. The girl recovering herself drew a hissing breath through her set teeth.

It is unnecessary to report the long process of questions and answers by which he soothed the fears of two old women who sat on each side of the fire, on which stood a large earthenware pot. Byrne thought at once of two witches watching the brewing of some deadly potion. But all the same, when one of them raising forward painfully her broken form lifted the cover of the pot, the escaping steam had an appetising smell. The other did not budge, but sat hunched up, her head trembling all the time.

They were horrible. There was something grotesque in their decrepitude. Their toothless mouths, their hooked noses, the meagreness of the active one, and the hanging yellow cheeks of the other (the still one, whose head

trembled) would have been laughable if the sight of their dreadful physical degradation had not been appalling to one's eyes, had not gripped one's heart with poignant amazement at the unspeakable misery of age, at the awful persistency of life becoming at last an object of disgust and dread.

To get over it Byrne began to talk, saying that he was an Englishman, and that he was in search of a countryman who ought to have passed this way. Directly he had spoken the recollection of his parting with Tom came up in his mind with amazing vividness: the silent villagers, the angry gnome, the one-eyed wine-seller, Bernardino. Why! These two unspeakable frights must be that man's aunts— affiliated to the devil.

Whatever they had been once it was impossible to imagine what use such feeble creatures could be to the devil, now, in the world of the living. Which was Lucilla and which was Erminia? They were now things without a name. A moment of suspended animation followed Byrne's words. The sorceress with the spoon ceased stirring the mess in the iron pot, the very trembling of the other's head stopped for the space of breath. In this infinitesimal fraction of a second Byrne had the sense of being really on his quest, of having reached the turn of the path, almost within hail of Tom.

"They have seen him," he thought with conviction. Here was at last somebody who had seen him. He made sure they would deny all knowledge of the Ingles; but on the contrary they were eager to tell him that he had eaten and slept the night in the house. They both started talking together, describing his appearance and behaviour. An excitement quite fierce in its feebleness possessed them. The doubled-up sorceress flourished aloft her wooden spoon, the puffy monster got off her stool and screeched, stepping from one foot to the other, while the trembling of her head was accelerated to positive vibration. Byrne was quite disconcerted by their excited behaviour…. Yes! The big, fierce Ingles went away in the morning, after eating a piece of bread and drinking some wine. And if the caballero wished to follow the same path nothing could be easier— in the morning.

"You will give me somebody to show me the way?" said Byrne.

"*Si,* señor. A proper youth. The man the caballero saw going out."

"But he was knocking at the door," protested Byrne. "He only bolted when he saw me. He was coming in."

"No! No!" the two horrid witches screamed out together. "Going out. Going out!"

After all it may have been true. The sound of knocking had been faint, elusive, reflected Byrne. Perhaps only the effect of his fancy. He asked—

"Who is that man?"

"Her *novio*." They screamed pointing to the girl. "He is gone home to a village far away from here. But he will return in the morning. Her novio! And she is an orphan— the child of poor Christian people. She lives with us for the love of God, for the love of God."

The orphan crouching on the corner of the hearth had been looking at Byrne. He thought that she was more like a child of Satan kept there by these two weird harridans for the love of the Devil. Her eyes were a little oblique, her mouth rather thick, but admirably formed; her dark face had a wild beauty, voluptuous and untamed. As to the character of her steadfast gaze attached upon him with a sensuously savage attention, "to know what it was like," says Mr. Byrne, "you have only to observe a hungry cat watching a bird in a cage or a mouse inside a trap."

It was she who served him the food, of which he was glad; though with those big slanting black eyes examining him at close range, as if he had something curious written on his face, she gave him an uncomfortable sensation. But anything was better than being approached by these blear-eyed nightmarish witches. His apprehensions somehow had been soothed; perhaps by the sensation of warmth after severe exposure and the ease of resting after the exertion of fighting the gale inch by inch all the way. He had no doubt of Tom's safety. He was now sleeping in the mountain camp having been met by Gonzales' men.

Byrne rose, filled a tin goblet with wine out of a skin hanging on the wall, and sat down again. The witch with the mummy face began to talk to him, ramblingly of old times; she boasted of the inn's fame in those better days. Great people in their own coaches stopped there. An archbishop slept once in the *casa*, a long, long time ago.

The witch with the puffy face seemed to be listening from her stool, motionless, except for the trembling of her head. The girl (Byrne was certain she was a casual gipsy admitted there for some reason or other) sat on the hearth stone in the glow of the embers. She hummed a tune to herself, rattling a pair of castanets slightly now and then. At the mention of the archbishop she chuckled impiously and turned her head to look at Byrne, so that the red glow of the fire flashed in her black eyes and on her white teeth under the dark cowl of the enormous overmantel. And he smiled at her.

He rested now in the ease of security. His advent not having been expected there could be no plot against him in existence. Drowsiness stole upon his senses. He enjoyed it, but keeping a hold, so he thought at least, on his wits; but he must have been gone further than he thought because he was startled beyond measure by a fiendish uproar. He had never heard anything so pitilessly strident in his life. The witches had started a fierce quarrel about

something or other. Whatever its origin they were now only abusing each other violently, without arguments; their senile screams expressed nothing but wicked anger and ferocious dismay. The gipsy girl's black eyes flew from one to the other. Never before had Byrne felt himself so removed from fellowship with human beings. Before he had really time to understand the subject of the quarrel, the girl jumped up rattling her castanets loudly. A silence fell. She came up to the table and bending over, her eyes in his—

"Señor," she said with decision, "You shall sleep in the archbishop's room."

Neither of the witches objected. The dried-up one bent double was propped on a stick. The puffy faced one had now a crutch.

Byrne got up, walked to the door, and turning the key in the enormous lock put it coolly in his pocket. This was clearly the only entrance, and he did not mean to be taken unawares by whatever danger there might have been lurking outside. When he turned from the door he saw the two witches "affiliated to the Devil" and the Satanic girl looking at him in silence. He wondered if Tom Corbin took the same precaution last night. And thinking of him he had again that queer impression of his nearness. The world was perfectly dumb. And in this stillness he heard the blood beating in his ears with a confused rushing noise, in which there seemed to be a voice uttering the words: "Mr. Byrne, look out, sir." Tom's voice. He shuddered; for the delusions of the senses of hearing are the most vivid of all, and from their nature have a compelling character.

It seemed impossible that Tom should not be there. Again a slight chill as of stealthy draught penetrated through his very clothes and passed over all his body. He shook off the impression with an effort.

It was the girl who preceded him upstairs carrying an iron lamp from the naked flame of which ascended a thin thread of smoke. Her soiled white stockings were full of holes.

With the same quiet resolution with which he had locked the door below, Byrne threw open one after another the doors in the corridor. All the rooms were empty except for some nondescript lumber in one or two. And the girl seeing what he would be at stopped every time, raising the smoky light in each doorway patiently. Meantime she observed him with sustained attention. The last door of all she threw open herself.

"You sleep here, señor," she murmured in a voice light like a child's breath, offering him the lamp.

"*Buenos noches, senorita*," he said politely, taking it from her.

She didn't return the wish audibly, though her lips did move a little, while her gaze black like a starless night never for a moment wavered before him. He stepped in, and as he turned to close the door she was still there motionless

and disturbing, with her voluptuous mouth and slanting eyes, with the expression of expectant sensual ferocity of a baffled cat. He hesitated for a moment, and in the dumb house he heard again the blood pulsating ponderously in his ears, while once more the illusion of Tom's voice speaking earnestly somewhere near by was specially terrifying, because this time he could not make out the words.

He slammed the door in the girl's face at last, leaving her in the dark; and he opened it again almost on the instant. Nobody. She had vanished without the slightest sound. He closed the door quickly and bolted it with two heavy bolts.

A profound mistrust possessed him suddenly. Why did the witches quarrel about letting him sleep here? And what meant that stare of the girl as if she wanted to impress his features for ever in her mind? His own nervousness alarmed him. He seemed to himself to be removed very far from mankind.

He examined his room. It was not very high, just high enough to take the bed which stood under an enormous baldaquin-like canopy from which fell heavy curtains at foot and head; a bed certainly worthy of an archbishop. There was a heavy table carved all round the edges, some arm-chairs of enormous weight like the spoils of a grandee's palace; a tall shallow wardrobe placed against the wall and with double doors. He tried them. Locked. A suspicion came into his mind, and he snatched the lamp to make a closer examination. No, it was not a disguised entrance. That heavy, tall piece of furniture stood clear of the wall by quite an inch. He glanced at the bolts of his room door. No! No one could get at him treacherously while he slept. But would he be able to sleep? he asked himself anxiously. If only he had Tom there— the trusty seaman who had fought at his right hand in a cutting out affair or two, and had always preached to him the necessity to take care of himself. "For it's no great trick," he used to say, "to get yourself killed in a hot fight. Any fool can do that. The proper pastime is to fight the Frenchies and then live to fight another day."

Byrne found it a hard matter not to fall into listening to the silence. Somehow he had the conviction that nothing would break it unless he heard again the haunting sound of Tom's voice. He had heard it twice before. Odd! And yet no wonder, he argued with himself reasonably, since he had been thinking of the man for over thirty hours continuously and, what's more, inconclusively. For his anxiety for Tom had never taken a definite shape. "Disappear," was the only word connected with the idea of Tom's danger. It was very vague and awful. "Disappear!" What did that mean?

Byrne shuddered, and then said to himself that he must be a little feverish. But Tom had not disappeared. Byrne had just heard of him. And again the

young man felt the blood beating in his ears. He sat still expecting every moment to hear through the pulsating strokes the sound of Tom's voice. He waited straining his ears, but nothing came. Suddenly the thought occurred to him: "He has not disappeared, but he cannot make himself heard."

He jumped up from the arm-chair. How absurd! Laying his pistol and his hanger on the table he took off his boots and, feeling suddenly too tired to stand, flung himself on the bed which he found soft and comfortable beyond his hopes.

He had felt very wakeful, but he must have dozed off after all, because the next thing he knew he was sitting up in bed and trying to recollect what it was that Tom's voice had said. Oh! He remembered it now. It had said: "Mr. Byrne! Look out, sir!" A warning this. But against what?

He landed with one leap in the middle of the floor, gasped once, then looked all round the room. The window was shuttered and barred with an iron bar. Again he ran his eyes slowly all round the bare walls, and even looked up at the ceiling, which was rather high. Afterwards he went to the door to examine the fastenings. They consisted of two enormous iron bolts sliding into holes made in the wall; and as the corridor outside was too narrow to admit of any battering arrangement or even to permit an axe to be swung, nothing could burst the door open— unless gunpowder. But while he was still making sure that the lower bolt was pushed well home, he received the impression of somebody's presence in the room. It was so strong that he spun round quicker than lightning. There was no one. Who could there be? And yet…

It was then that he lost the decorum and restraint a man keeps up for his own sake. He got down on his hands and knees, with the lamp on the floor, to look under the bed, like a silly girl. He saw a lot of dust and nothing else. He got up, his cheeks burning, and walked about discontented with his own behaviour and unreasonably angry with Tom for not leaving him alone. The words: "Mr. Byrne! Look out, sir," kept on repeating themselves in his head in a tone of warning.

"Hadn't I better just throw myself on the bed and try to go to sleep," he asked himself. But his eyes fell on the tall wardrobe, and he went towards it feeling irritated with himself and yet unable to desist. How he could explain to-morrow the burglarious misdeed to the two odious witches he had no idea. Nevertheless he inserted the point of his hanger between the two halves of the door and tried to prize them open. They resisted. He swore, sticking now hotly to his purpose. His mutter: "I hope you will be satisfied, confound you," was addressed to the absent Tom. Just then the doors gave way and flew open.

He was there.

He— the trusty, sagacious, and courageous Tom was there, drawn up shadowy and stiff, in a prudent silence, which his wide-open eyes by their fixed gleam seemed to command Byrne to respect. But Byrne was too startled to make a sound. Amazed, he stepped back a little— and on the instant the seaman flung himself forward headlong as if to clasp his officer round the neck. Instinctively Byrne put out his faltering arms; he felt the horrible rigidity of the body and then the coldness of death as their heads knocked together and their faces came into contact. They reeled, Byrne hugging Tom close to his breast in order not to let him fall with a crash. He had just strength enough to lower the awful burden gently to the floor— then his head swam, his legs gave way, and he sank on his knees, leaning over the body with his hands resting on the breast of that man once full of generous life, and now as insensible as a stone.

"Dead! my poor Tom, dead," he repeated mentally. The light of the lamp standing near the edge of the table fell from above straight on the stony empty stare of these eyes which naturally had a mobile and merry expression.

Byrne turned his own away from them. Tom's black silk neckerchief was not knotted on his breast. It was gone. The murderers had also taken off his shoes and stockings. And noticing this spoliation, the exposed throat, the bare up-turned feet, Byrne felt his eyes run full of tears. In other respects the seaman was fully dressed; neither was his clothing disarranged as it must have been in a violent struggle. Only his checked shirt had been pulled a little out the waistband in one place, just enough to ascertain whether he had a money belt fastened round his body. Byrne began to sob into his handkerchief.

It was a nervous outburst which passed off quickly. Remaining on his knees he contemplated sadly the athletic body of as fine a seaman as ever had drawn a cutlass, laid a gun, or passed the weather earring in a gale, lying stiff and cold, his cheery, fearless spirit departed— perhaps turning to him, his boy chum, to his ship out there rolling on the grey seas off an iron-bound coast, at the very moment of its flight.

He perceived that the six brass buttons of Tom's jacket had been cut off. He shuddered at the notion of the two miserable and repulsive witches busying themselves ghoulishly about the defenceless body of his friend. Cut off. Perhaps with the same knife which… The head of one trembled; the other was bent double, and their eyes were red and bleared, their infamous claws unsteady…. It must have been in this very room too, for Tom could not have been killed in the open and brought in here afterwards. Of that Byrne was certain. Yet those devilish crones could not have killed him themselves even by taking him unawares— and Tom would be always on his guard of course. Tom was a very wide awake wary man when engaged on any service…. And in fact how did they murder him? Who did? In what way?

Byrne jumped up, snatched the lamp off the table, and stooped swiftly over the body. The light revealed on the clothing no stain, no trace, no spot of blood anywhere. Byrne's hands began to shake so that he had to set the lamp on the floor and turn away his head in order to recover from this agitation.

Then he began to explore that cold, still, and rigid body for a stab, a gunshot wound, for the trace of some killing blow. He felt all over the skull anxiously. It was whole. He slipped his hand under the neck. It was unbroken. With terrified eyes he peered close under the chin and saw no marks of strangulation on the throat.

There were no signs anywhere. He was just dead.

Impulsively Byrne got away from the body as if the mystery of an incomprehensible death had changed his pity into suspicion and dread. The lamp on the floor near the set, still face of the seaman showed it staring at the ceiling as if despairingly. In the circle of light Byrne saw by the undisturbed patches of thick dust on the floor that there had been no struggle in that room. "He has died outside," he thought. Yes, outside in that narrow corridor, where there was hardly room to turn, the mysterious death had come to his poor dear Tom. The impulse of snatching up his pistols and rushing out of the room abandoned Byrne suddenly. For Tom, too, had been armed— with just such powerless weapons as he himself possessed— pistols, a cutlass! And Tom had died a nameless death, by incomprehensible means.

A new thought came to Byrne. That stranger knocking at the door and fleeing so swiftly at his appearance had come there to remove the body. Aha! That was the guide the withered witch had promised would show the English officer the shortest way of rejoining his man. A promise, he saw it now, of dreadful import. He who had knocked would have two bodies to deal with. Man and officer would go forth from the house together. For Byrne was certain now that he would have to die before the morning— and in the same mysterious manner, leaving behind him an unmarked body.

The sight of a smashed head, of a throat cut, of a gaping gunshot wound, would have been an inexpressible relief. It would have soothed all his fears. His soul cried within him to that dead man whom he had never found wanting in danger. "Why don't you tell me what I am to look for, Tom? Why don't you?" But in rigid immobility, extended on his back, he seemed to preserve an austere silence, as if disdaining in the finality of his awful knowledge to hold converse with the living.

Suddenly Byrne flung himself on his knees by the side of the body, and dry-eyed, fierce, opened the shirt wide on the breast, as if to tear the secret forcibly from that cold heart which had been so loyal to him in life! Nothing! Nothing! He raised the lamp, and all the sign vouchsafed to him by that face

which used to be so kindly in expression was a small bruise on the forehead— the least thing, a mere mark. The skin even was not broken. He stared at it a long time as if lost in a dreadful dream. Then he observed that Tom's hands were clenched as though he had fallen facing somebody in a fight with fists. His knuckles, on closer view, appeared somewhat abraded. Both hands.

The discovery of these slight signs was more appalling to Byrne than the absolute absence of every mark would have been. So Tom had died striking against something which could be hit, and yet could kill one without leaving a wound— by a breath.

Terror, hot terror, began to play about Byrne's heart like a tongue of flame that touches and withdraws before it turns a thing to ashes. He backed away from the body as far as he could, then came forward stealthily casting fearful glances to steal another look at the bruised forehead. There would perhaps be such a faint bruise on his own forehead— before the morning.

"I can't bear it," he whispered to himself. Tom was for him now an object of horror, a sight at once tempting and revolting to his fear. He couldn't bear to look at him.

At last, desperation getting the better of his increasing horror, he stepped forward from the wall against which he had been leaning, seized the corpse under the armpits, and began to lug it over to the bed. The bare heels of the seaman trailed on the floor noiselessly. He was heavy with the dead weight of inanimate objects. With a last effort Byrne landed him face downwards on the edge of the bed, rolled him over, snatched from under this stiff passive thing a sheet with which he covered it over. Then he spread the curtains at head and foot so that joining together as he shook their folds they hid the bed altogether from his sight.

He stumbled towards a chair, and fell on it. The perspiration poured from his face for a moment, and then his veins seemed to carry for a while a thin stream of half-frozen blood. Complete terror had possession of him now, a nameless terror which had turned his heart to ashes.

He sat upright in the straight-backed chair, the lamp burning at his feet, his pistols and his hanger at his left elbow on the end of the table, his eyes turning incessantly in their sockets round the walls, over the ceiling, over the floor, in the expectation of a mysterious and appalling vision. The thing which could deal death in a breath was outside that bolted door. But Byrne believed neither in walls nor bolts now. Unreasoning terror turning everything to account, his old time boyish admiration of the athletic Tom, the undaunted Tom (he had seemed to him invincible), helped to paralyse his faculties, added to his despair.

He was no longer Edgar Byrne. He was a tortured soul suffering more anguish than any sinner's body had ever suffered from rack or boot. The depth of his torment may be measured when I say that this young man, as brave at least as the average of his kind, contemplated seizing a pistol and firing into his own head. But a deadly, chilly, langour was spreading over his limbs. It was as if his flesh had been wet plaster stiffening slowly about his ribs. Presently, he thought, the two witches will be coming in, with crutch and stick— horrible, grotesque, monstrous— affiliated to the devil— to put a mark on his forehead, the tiny little bruise of death. And he wouldn't be able to do anything. Tom had struck out at something, but he was not like Tom. His limbs were dead already. He sat still, dying the death over and over again; and the only part of him which moved were his eyes, turning round and round in their sockets, running over the walls, the floor, the ceiling, again and again till suddenly they became motionless and stony— starting out of his head fixed in the direction of the bed.

He had seen the heavy curtains stir and shake as if the dead body they concealed had turned over and sat up. Byrne, who thought the world could hold no more terrors in store, felt his hair stir at the roots. He gripped the arms of the chair, his jaw fell, and the sweat broke out on his brow while his dry tongue clove suddenly to the roof of his mouth. Again the curtains stirred, but did not open. "Don't, Tom!" Byrne made effort to shout, but all he heard was a slight moan such as an uneasy sleeper may make. He felt that his brain was going, for, now, it seemed to him that the ceiling over the bed had moved, had slanted, and came level again— and once more the closed curtains swayed gently as if about to part.

Byrne closed his eyes not to see the awful apparition of the seaman's corpse coming out animated by an evil spirit. In the profound silence of the room he endured a moment of frightful agony, then opened his eyes again. And he saw at once that the curtains remained closed still, but that the ceiling over the bed had risen quite a foot. With the last gleam of reason left to him he understood that it was the enormous baldaquin over the bed which was coming down, while the curtains attached to it swayed softly, sinking gradually to the floor. His drooping jaw snapped to— and half rising in his chair he watched mutely the noiseless descent of the monstrous canopy. It came down in short smooth rushes till lowered half way or more, when it took a run and settled swiftly its turtle-back shape with the deep border piece fitting exactly the edge of the bedstead. A slight crack or two of wood were heard, and the overpowering stillness of the room resumed its sway.

Byrne stood up, gasped for breath, and let out a cry of rage and dismay, the first sound which he is perfectly certain did make its way past his lips on

this night of terrors. This then was the death he had escaped! This was the devilish artifice of murder poor Tom's soul had perhaps tried from beyond the border to warn him of. For this was how he had died. Byrne was certain he had heard the voice of the seaman, faintly distinct in his familiar phrase, "Mr. Byrne! Look out, sir!" and again uttering words he could not make out. But then the distance separating the living from the dead is so great! Poor Tom had tried. Byrne ran to the bed and attempted to lift up, to push off the horrible lid smothering the body. It resisted his efforts, heavy as lead, immovable like a tombstone. The rage of vengeance made him desist; his head buzzed with chaotic thoughts of extermination, he turned round the room as if he could find neither his weapons nor the way out; and all the time he stammered awful menaces….

A violent battering at the door of the inn recalled him to his soberer senses. He flew to the window, pulled the shutters open, and looked out. In the faint dawn he saw below him a mob of men. Ha! He would go and face at once this murderous lot collected no doubt for his undoing. After his struggle with nameless terrors he yearned for an open fray with armed enemies. But he must have remained yet bereft of his reason, because forgetting his weapons he rushed downstairs with a wild cry, unbarred the door while blows were raining on it outside, and flinging it open flew with his bare hands at the throat of the first man he saw before him. They rolled over together. Byrne's hazy intention was to break through, to fly up the mountain path, and come back presently with Gonzales' men to exact an exemplary vengeance. He fought furiously till a tree, a house, a mountain, seemed to crash down upon his head— and he knew no more.

HERE Mr. Byrne describes in detail the skilful manner in which he found his broken head bandaged, informs us that he had lost a great deal of blood, and ascribes the preservation of his sanity to that circumstance. He sets down Gonzales' profuse apologies in full too. For it was Gonzales who, tired of waiting for news from the English, had come down to the inn with half his band, on his way to the sea. "His excellency," he explained, "rushed out with fierce impetuosity, and, moreover, was not known to us for a friend, and so we… etc., etc. When asked what had become of the witches, he only pointed his finger silently to the ground, then voiced calmly a moral reflection: "The passion for gold is pitiless in the very old, señor," he said. "No doubt in former days they have put many a solitary traveller to sleep in the archbishop's bed."

"There was also a gipsy girl there," said Byrne feebly from the improvised litter on which he was being carried to the coast by a squad of *guerilleros*.

"It was she who winched up that infernal machine, and it was she too who lowered it that night," was the answer.

"But why? Why?" exclaimed Byrne. "Why should she wish for my death?"

"No doubt for the sake of your excellency's coat buttons," said politely the saturnine Gonzales. "We found those of the dead mariner concealed on her person. But your excellency may rest assured that everything that is fitting has been done on this occasion."

Byrne asked no more questions. There was still another death which was considered by Gonzales as "fitting to the occasion." The one-eyed Bernardino stuck against the wall of his wine-shop received the charge of six escopettas into his breast. As the shots rang out the rough bier with Tom's body on it went past carried by a bandit-like gang of Spanish patriots down the ravine to the shore, where two boats from the ship were waiting for what was left on earth of her best seaman.

Mr. Byrne, very pale and weak, stepped into the boat which carried the body of his humble friend. For it was decided that Tom Corbin should rest far out in the bay of Biscay. The officer took the tiller and, turning his head for the last look at the shore, saw on the grey hillside something moving, which he made out to be a little man in a yellow hat mounted on a mule— that mule without which the fate of Tom Corbin would have remained mysterious for ever.

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