PAST MASTERS 162

Earl Derr Biggers
Booth Tarkington
H de Vere Stacpoole
Edgar Wallace
H G Wells
W W Jacobs
E M Delafield
Edgar Jepson

and more

PAST MASTERS 162

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 Entry of Dragour

Bertram Atkey

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This story is the first in a short series called "Dragour, the Drugmaster" which ran in consecutive issues of Cassells*, a UK monthly, from the Dec 1923 issue, and in* Popular Magazine*, a US weekly, from 7 April, 1924. Episodes 2 and 3 can be found at Roy Glashan's Library (www.freeread.com.au). The last five are still elusive. If all 8 are about the same length at this one, taken together they would form an episodic novel of some 60,000 words.*

THE big police officer who was slowly making his sunny, afternoon perambulation of Green Square halted for a moment outside the small, retired house in the southwest corner of that quietest of central London squares, glanced up at the open window of the second floor and listened intently.

But it was not in his professional capacity that he listened, though it was an uncommon sound which had brought him to a leisurely standstill— the clear, wild note of a piping bullfinch which was issuing from that upper window like a moving thread of silver wire.

The policeman knitted his brow as he listened, for there was something vaguely familiar about the song of the bird. He was recruited from the countryside and knew the note of a bullfinch— but he had never known a bullfinch sing that air or any air resembling it before.

He waited a few seconds. Then suddenly his square, heavy face cleared and he smiled.

"It's a song— can't remember the name, but I can remember the tune. Mr. Chayne's done well with that bird since I was on this beat last."

He nodded, smiled and moved on, absently whistling, very softly, the first few bars of a song that once was tremendously popular— "Oh, Promise Me!"

That was what the bullfinch had been piping— perhaps the first ten bars— as truly as and more sweetly than any instrument.

The exquisite notes followed the big policeman as, reaching the corner he hesitated a moment, then left the curb and moved to make his way diagonally across the small, tree-planted, railed space in the middle of the square.

This "garden" was empty save for one person, an enormous man, very largely built as well as very fat, who was sitting on a lonely seat set by some discouraged-looking shrubs.

The policeman paused by this man who, sitting perfectly still, was staring straight ahead of him with dull eyes, very black and seeming very small, set in

that vast expanse of smooth-shaven face. His complexion was so extremely dark that although one would have hesitated to call him a man of color, few would have confidently described him as a white man.

The policeman moved his hand in a nicely discriminated semisalute.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Dass,” he said affably. "Mr. Chayne seems to be doing well with the bullfinch.”

The dark, elephantine man turned his lack-luster eyes on the constable. For a moment they were totally devoid of expression— remaining blank with the utter blankness of those of one long habituated to the study of abstruse, remote and intricately complicated problems.

The policeman’s smile widened, for the deep trances of Mr. Kotman Dass were no novelty to him. He spoke a little more loudly.

“I say that Mr. Chayne’s bullfinch is improving, sir!”

The dark man started violently, staring dully about him like one just reviving from the effects of an anesthetic.

“Eh! Yess— yess! Thee bird, you say. Oh, certainlee, officer— veree perettee!”

He steadied himself, controlled the small fluster into which the sudden appearance and speech of the policeman and his own abrupt return to consciousness of his immediate surroundings had thrown him, and spoke again. This time his English was devoid of that curious, sharply clipped accent with which he had first spoken.

“Ah! Good afternoon, officer. It is some weeks since you patrolled this beat. I was meditating and your sudden appearance startled me. How do you do! It is singularly perfect weather. Yes, Mr. Chayne has worked wonders with the bullfinch. Its note is very sweet.”

He raised a huge, shapeless hand.

Across the square, soaring above the hoarse, rough chirpings of the London sparrows gossiping all about them, came the thin, silver note of the bird singing in that topfloor room of No. 10.

“Very pretty, Mr. Dass,” said the policeman. “It wants a lot of patience to do that.”

Kotman Dass nodded a ponderous head.

“With some of the little wild ones, yes. With others, no. Mr. Salaman Chayne is a man of infinite patience— with bullfinches!”

“I'll be bound he is,” said the policeman, and nodded, moving on in the leisurely, measured, irresistible-seeming walk of the police officer the world over.

For a few seconds the dark eyes of the fat man followed the blue-clad figure. If they held any expression at all it was of apprehension.

Mr. Dass took out a blinding orange and emerald silk handkerchief and wiped his immense forehead.

"Jollee good fellows, these London police, yess," he muttered uneasily, "but veree devoid of tact. To approach a gentleman obviouslee lost in thought— engaged in profound reflection— and to address him soa veree abruptlee is not the act off a tactful policeman."

He sighed cavernously, rose and, still holding his brilliant handkerchief, went toward the house of the bullfinch— the house which was the home of Mr. Kotman Dass and his friend and informal partner, Mr. Salaman Slaymore Chayne. He went with slow ponderously dragging steps that grew slower and slower yet, until halfway across the road they ceased, and Mr. Dass stood still, staring blankly ahead— an enormous and unshapely figure, black-clad, with an alpaca coat and a worn black-and-white straw hat, vaguely clerical looking, the blinding handkerchief still dangling from his hand.

Standing in the exact center of the road, he was quite obviously lost in thought.

But this time he muttered to himself, as one recapitulating a matter in his mind might do. He spoke in the odd, clipped, chi-chi which he invariably used when not speaking with a conscious guard on his tongue.

"It iss undoubtedlee logical conclusion thatt there is master mind att work— in supreme control off thee vast bulk off illicit drug traffic. Where there are little veins, there are arteries, where there are arteries there iss a heart. Oah, yess. Twenty-six perfectlee sound deductions prove thatt, I think. I shall convince Mister Chayne—"

A taxicab bustled into the small square— a rare visitor at that hour of the day— and bore down upon the gigantic dreamer.

He did not appear to notice it— staring straight ahead, his lips moving.

The taxi horn hooted like an angry duck.

Mr. Kotman Dass, utterly oblivious, continued to dream.

It is a tacitly accepted rule of the road that both parties to a passing do their share of any swerving necessary. Only thus are accidents avoided. The huge Mr. Dass, fathoms deep in thought, left it to the taxi driver to do both his own and Mr. Dass' share of the swerving. Which that motor bandit did with a violent and raucous spate of very evil talk— just as Mr. Salaman Chayne chanced to put his neat head out of the window, his hot, gray-green eyes instantly photographing the situation.

He leaned out almost dangerously.

"Damn you, Dass, you are obstructing the traffic. Get out of the light, can't you!"

The voice of Mr. Salaman Chayne was acrid, distinct and penetrating. It cleaved through the reveries of Kotman Dass like an arrowhead dipped in acid— and the ponderous one woke up. He moved weightily to the pavement with something in his motion akin to that of a large bullock endeavoring to rise hastily from a recumbent position.

The taxi driver laughed sourly and rattled round the bend.

Mr. Dass glanced up apologetically, made several deprecatory gestures and let himself into the house.

"Oah, yess— a man of infinite patience— with bullfinches only. With me, Mister Chayne is soa hasty always," he muttered. "But he will be veree highlee delighted with thee twenty-six deductions!"

And so laboriously he began to climb the stairs.

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THE ROOM to which Kotman Dass successfully transported his astonishing weight was, like many other things in No. 10 Green Square, unexpected.

It was tenanted by birds— uncaged.

There were perhaps as many as fifty, of various species, about the room, which was lined with neat little nesting boxes. There was not a cage in the room. Every bird was free—really free for the big window was widely open. The place was busy with the pretty traffic of the little winged folk, going out or coming in— finches, linnets, sparrows. Robins flickered there and some brilliant blue-tits— busy, peering, inquisitive mites. There were a number of foreign small birds, very ornate, and a pair of wrens had a "desirable detached residence" in a tiny box in a high corner. A number were playing about in a big basin of water sunk in the floor,

For some years Salaman Chayne and Kotman Dass had lived together— upon their wits, or, rather, upon the wits of Mr. Dass and the physical activities of Mr. Chayne— indissolubly partners, in spite of the fact that they were diametrically opposed in almost every conceivable way that matters. But upon one point they were wholly at unity— they loved birds and birds loved them. At least, no bird ever feared either. They were bird men— bird masters, bird slaves.

It was the one gift the two men possessed in common and in like proportion—this wonderful, enviable charm over the little feathered folk, and the passion to exert it.

Out of their general, catholic love for birds developed more particular passions— resolving themselves in the case of Salaman into an intense interest in, and an uncanny mastery of, the art of training the wild bullfinch to pipe

man-made airs; and in the case of Kotman Dass into an illimitably patient and eerily successful effort to teach that incorrigible ventriloquist, the starling, something of the English vocabulary. There was rivalry, if not jealousy.

Kotman Dass had a friend— an elderly starling long a permanent boarder of his own free will, who could say “Good morning, Dass,” as clearly as any parrot.

But against this Salaman Chayne could now set another practically permanent guest— a bullfinch with a twisted claw whose achievements had so interested the police officer.

To the sanctuary of the upper floor of No. 10 birds came and went or stayed as they listed.

It was to this room that the mountainous Kotman Dass ascended.

Salaman Chayne had just finished the bullfinch’s lesson for that day and met his partner on the landing outside the door.

He was lighting a very large and very good cigar, and paused in this operation to state a simple home truth to Dass.

“Some day they will bring your remains home on several lorries, Dass,” he said. “What were you dreaming about out in the square? But we will have it downstairs, I think.”

“Oah, yess— downstairs assuredlee!” agreed Mr. Dass, turning unwieldily and retreating down the creaking stairs, followed by his partner— and that was as if a squirrel followed a bear.

For Salaman was little and slim and darting like an arrow or a wasp or a lance. Five feet three and steely as a sword blade.

He was probably the neatest, jauntiest, cleanest, most fastidious little man in London and if he had been several sizes larger he might have claimed to be in his clean-cut way one of the best looking, for he was completely and perfectly symmetrical and his thin, hawkish, brown face was well, if boldly, modeled, and illumined by a pair of queer, hot, compelling gray-green eyes with a hint of yellow in them. They were never free from a curious smoldering ferocity. All his movements were neat, quick— except when with the birds— dainty and cat silent. His hair was corn colored, and he wore a thin. narrow, dagger-shaped beard of the same yellow hue. He carried himself with the fierce easy cockiness of a man conscious of his diminutive size and even more so of the fact that in spite of his size he was far more than averagely competent to take care of himself.

Salaman, among his fellow men, was rather like one of those trim, businesslike, game bantam cocks, in a barnyard full of fat and flustering hens. His cockiness was in his air and carriage more than in his manner which, save when irritated by adverse circumstances or his partner, was that of a near-

enough gentleman. It had on occasion come as a surprise to certain of the misguided to learn that the little man carried in each hand a punch which could fan into fairyland most men half as big again as Mr. Chayne; and though his brains were on about the same scale as his body, nevertheless there was room in them for a formidable knowledge of Japanese wrestling. He could cling to a fighting horse as that agile monkey known as the gibbon can cling with one finger to the topmost bough of the old home tree— and, he was a dead shot with most weapons, including his mouth and the dainty sword cane he invariably carried.

He was devoid of illusions concerning his partner whom he treated much as the small precocious son of a mahout may treat a gigantic but humble-minded elephant— or a little quick wife a large slow husband.

To Salaman, Mr. Dass was ever ready to admit that, though English, he indubitably numbered among his ancestors certain “highlee” placed inhabitants of far-off India.

Salaman would agree.

“Yes, Dass. I guessed that on the first occasion I heard you suddenly slip from decent English into a sort of chi-chi. Anybody who ever heard you speak in a moment of haste or excitement would know that. Even your starling says ‘Yess’ instead of 'Yes,’ ”

Meekly the colossal Dass would agree.

“I know. I know that it is so, Mister Chayne.”’

“Personally I have no objection to your admittedly mysterious and complicated parentage and ancestry, Dass,” the hot-eyed Salaman would continue. “Your amazing brains annul and cancel all that. It’s not your ancestry that irks me— it’s your—"

Kotman would nod his vast head, heavily and slowly.

“Yess, yess, it is my appalling lack off physical courage that discommodes you, Mister Chayne. J know. Thee heart of a fat sheep upon the hillsides— yess. A highlee disgusting coward. Yess, I see thatt, certainlee”— sighing gustily.

It was true. While Kotman Dass possessed a brain which Salaman Chayne sincerely believed practically unparalleled, his personal courage was precisely nil, his habits were untidy and his customs slovenly.

The partnership flourished only because the cold-blooded courage of Salaman was added to the astonishing brain of Kotman Dass. They were to each other what the lock is to the key, the hammer to the anvil, the knife to the fork. There certainly was in Kotman Dass much that Salaman Chayne despised— and said so; and there may have been in Salaman Chayne much

that Kotman Dass despised— and carefully did not say so; but both believed that united they might stand and, divided, fall.

Kotman Dass began speaking hastily and propitiatingly before they had reached their favorite sitting room.

“It was veree foolish to linger in thee path of taxicabs, Mister Chayne, I confess thatt. But my mind was busilee occupied with small problem off thee Lady Argrath which you brought to my notice thiss morning.”

His tone was changing curiously. He had begun on a nervous apologetic note, but as he proceeded he appeared to gain confidence.

“I have considered thee matters of Lady Argrath; her attitude to her husband, your cousin; and Sir James Argrath’s peculiar fluctuations between extremely high spirits and bouts of profound gloom.”

Kotman Dass leaned back in his chair and raised a huge hand as though to tick off certain points on his fingers.

“The material which you gave me to consider was as follows,” he said. "You advised me that, firstly—"

Salaman Chayne stirred restlessly.

“All right, all right— I know what I told you, Dass. Don’t waste time repeating all that over again. What I want from you is not a long account of the way you’ve churned your brains over the information I gave you. I want your conclusions briefly not a lecture on the art of arriving at conclusions.”

Kotman Dass looked reproachfully at his acrid little partner.

“It was veree interesting speculation,” he said.

“No doubt— to you. But I am only interested in results.”

Kotman Dass nodded resignedly.

“Very well, Mister Chayne. I have arrived by infallible chain of reasoning at thee following conclusions. Lady Argrath is a drug addict, a traitress to her husband, and I think thatt she is trying to lure you into a condition which will render you useful to her for some purpose at present obscure to me— for lack of data.”

He was staring absently before him— like a man whose eyes are really looking inward to read his own brain, as clear as a printed sheet inside his skull.

“Tt is theoretically incontrovertible that she is false as she is beautiful; that she is utterly heartless, completely selfish, unquestionably dangerous. A fierce, cold, and formidable vampire. I shall demonstrate irrefutably to you—from the material you gave me— that she is a liar, that she betrays her husband in many ways, that she will inevitably ruin him and probably you; that she is possessed of a mentality compared with which yours and that of your cousin are the mentalities of two wax dolls; and that logically she must be in league with an evil Force of which I have repeatedly suspected the existence. Of this

mysterious and deadly Force I will speak presently, but first I will finish acquainting you with the true nature— as made perfectly apparent by the evidence— of this beautiful vampire in whom you are interesting yourself—"

Mr. Dass broke off suddenly as Salaman leaped to his feet, glaring.

"I have a good mind to give you the damnedest hiding you've ever had in your life, you libelous scoundrel!" he snarled. "You dare to sit there like a— a— an overfed whale and roll out a string of low slanderous untruths like that! Why, I simply can't keep my hands off you!"

Mr. Dass collapsed like a child's air ball touched— in a spirit of curiosity— by her big brother's cigarette end.

He moved his hands hastily, aimlessly; he began to show the yellowish whites of his eyes; his face took on a greenish pallor; he trembled very much and he began to gabble almost meaningless apologies. He was a very frightened man. His English was shattered to fragments.

"Oah, my dear Mister Chayne, but please noticing thatt I speak purelee abstract fashion. That was impersonal intended certainlee— same fashion as professor speaks off microbes."

"Microbes!" roared Salaman Chayne, glaring. "Lady Argrath—"

"Iff you please, noa, noa. She iss not microbes, assuredlee not— it was onlee hurree to explain manner off reference to her I used thatt expression. I— meditated upon lady and reported on same lady in spirit of professor meditating and reporting on veree difficult problem. Personallee she is undoubted veree charming ladee, oah, yess, I readilee agree and apologize thousands times."

He brightened up a little as the glare died out of Salaman's fierce eyes.

"Ten thousand apologies, my dear fellow, Mister Chayne," he gabbled, propitiatingly.

Salaman ignored this offer of apology in bulk, and stared at Mr. Dass over his cigar with something very like uneasiness replacing the fading anger in his eyes.

He had had too many proofs of Kotman Dass' mental abilities to be able to shake off lightly any unpleasing deductions made by that large person from data relating to any one.

Though by no means in love with the beautiful wife of his cousin Sir James Argrath, a well-known company promoter and financier, the wasplike Mr. Chayne undoubtedly was interested in her— so interested indeed that he had seen enough of her and her household to have been puzzled by a number of small matters he had noticed there. These he had carried to the scalpelminded Mr. Dass— and now Mr. Dass had reported upon them— in the annoying fashion related.

"Of course, you're as wrong about Lady Argrath as it's possible for a man to be. But just what did you mean by an evil Force? Did you mean a man, a ghost, or a devil?" said Salaman, with acid irony after a few moments reflection.

"Oah, a man— but a man with much devil in him also," replied Dass, still eying his partner apprehensively.

"You see, Mister Chayne, I have formed thee conclusion from various facts— they have nothing whatever to do with Lady Argrath, certainlee not— that somewhere concealed behind all thee traffic off the illicit drug trade, secret like cobra in his hole, iss an Intelligence. A man, I have decided. It iss veree plainlee manifested to me in number off recent drug affairs thatt there iss a master mind— off its class— moving behind— secretlee— in thee dark— like spider sitting in center off her web—onlee much more active than spider!"

His eyes were growing veiled and absent again.

"Much more active, yess. I trace his hand— thee same hand— in many affairs."

"What affairs? Get to facts, will you, Dass?"

"Oah, readilee, my dear fellow. Such affairs as thee collapse off Harlow's Bank and arrest off directors; thee scandal off Countess off Barford's Jockey and thee Barford heirlooms; thee recent matter off thee defalcations off four cashiers at the London & Southern Bank; the accidental death off Clyde Hamer off thee Airplane Postal Service; thee fifty-per-cent drop in value off thee shares off Burma Ruby Company; thee murder of Colonel Carrel on Salisbury Plain; and many other recent affairs!"

Salaman stared.

"You mean fo tell me that you can trace the hand of this mysterious Master Mind in all those affairs, Dass?"

"Oah, yess, by all means," said Kotman Dass, with an ingratiating smile.

"How?" said Salaman, stiffening.

"Oah, veree simple matter. My reflections have brought me to conclusion thatt this Master Mind whom I call in my mind by thee letter X is in control off great bulk off smuggled drugs and also director off distribution off same to drug addicts."

"Hum! He'd make a big profit— if there were such a man," said Salaman.

Kotman Dass shook his head gently.

"Itt does not seem to me— if you are agreeable, Mister Chayne— that X cares veree much about thee profits off drugs. He would do better than thatt!"

"How d'ye mean, Dass?"

"It iss complicated matter. I have formed conclusion that thee man X— that is to say the Drugmaster—first ensnares with drug habit people— women— highlee placed ladies—"

Salaman scowled.

"Be careful, damn you, Dass!"

"Oah yess, assuredlee," said the fat man, hurriedly, and continued: 'X ensnares people who know valuable secrets, who have valuable information confided in them— such as financier may confide in his wife— and presentlee, depriving victim off drug, he reduces victim to condition in which poor soul will exchange important secrets for fresh supply off drug. Then X uses secrets for his own benefit."

Salaman stared.

"You believe that, Dass?"

"Oah, I can mathematically demonstrate that itt iss true,"' said the fat man.

"And you say Lady Argrath is one of his victims, do you?" persisted little Mr. Chayne.

Kotman Dass glanced swiftly at the menacing green eyes, and hastily looked away again.

"Oah, noa, decidedlee I do not say thatt!" he answered. "But itt iss very conceivable thatt she may be!"

"Bah! Heart of a white mouse!" sneered Salaman, turned on his heel and left the room.

Kotman Dass listened for a moment, grinned nervously, then leaned heavily back and submerged himself in that deep sea of thought in which he spent half his life.

iii

SALAMAN CHAYNE was far more disturbed by the "conclusions" of Mr. Dass than he had allowed that curiously gifted individual to see.

He had many times disputed the correctness of his partner's views on matters which he had considered— but he had never yet found the fat man wrong in the long run.

And the "cowardly" denial that Lady Argrath had anything to do with the mysterious X was too belated and too obviously inspired by the physical terrors of Mr. Dass to be taken seriously.

Salaman, out of his experience, knew that a woman was almost certain to be what Kotman Dass said she was. For the fat man was uncannily gifted, and had long ago proved it.

Still, even the cleverest man makes a mistake sooner or later, and Salaman Chayne presently left the house in Green Square with the hope though not the conviction that possibly the time had come when Kotman Dass was making his first error.

“I think the cowardly hound is wrong— I’m sure he’s wrong,” mused Salaman as he stepped briskly along. "But, in any case, I shall form my own judgment. If there is anything in her manner this afternoon to suggest that he is right I shall not fail to observe it.”

He was going to call on Lady Argrath, and he intended to study her more closely, and from a different angle, than he had ever done before.

But she was “not at home,” and he sought his club where, for tea, he took two whiskies and sodas— absorbing these with an air of ferocious gloom which very effectively procured for him the solitude he desired. But even the stimulants were contrary. They seemed to depress him rather than raise his spirits.

Small, bristling and sulky he sat long over his second drink, pondering the statements— as many of them as he could remember—of Kotman Dass. His confidence that the fat man was wrong had long dwindled.

He endeavored to recollect some of the affairs which Dass said had resulted from the infamous activities of X, the drugmaster, but except for the mysterious murder of Colonel Carrel, a quite recent sensation, and the drop in Burma Ruby shares, they had slipped his mind.

“How the half-bred rascal contrives to put two and two together in the way he does puzzles me— would puzzle any normal-minded man,” muttered Salaman‘to himself, “and I don’t see that he had the slightest ground for connecting Lady Argrath with this— this drugmaster,” he added, comfortably ignoring or forgetting that he had refused to listen to an account of the obscure and intricate mental processes which had brought Kotman Dass to his “conclusions.”

“I don’t see it— I don’t see it at all. Damn it, I decline to see it,” snarled Salaman at half past seven, finished his whisky, was conscious of hunger, and went sullenly forth to dine at Gaspard’s, a small, quiet but well-managed and rather expensive restaurant in a side street off the Haymarket.

Still pondering his problem he secured his favorite corner, rather brusquely desired the head waiter to help choose him his dinner, and continued to ponder.

“She’s altogether too fine and sweet and beautiful to have to do with this X man. What signs has she ever shown that she uses , drugs? Occasionally she’s depressed, yes— and occasionally she brightens up rather quickly— but so do many people.”

Dimly it came to him that whenever that sudden change had happened while he was with her she had left him for a few moments. That is— she had left the room languid and melancholy, and a little later she had returned a different woman. A little thing, of course— but did it mean anything?

“But drugs eat away a woman’s beauty— and a blind man could see that Creuse Argrath is one of the most beautiful womer in London! And she has told me herself that she does not get on with James Arerath. Certainly that’s not hard to believe. James is a money maniac— always abstracted, always brooding, his mind obviously always hovering over the gold tide in the City— like a fish hawk or a gull over the water. No, Dass is wrong; he—"

Salaman’s train of thought was suddenly dislocated, for a woman sitting several tables away with her back to a pillar which had helped conceal her from his quiet corner, moved her chair slightly and so became more plainly visible to him.

The eyes of the little man suddenly glowed.

It was Lady Argrath dining with a man whom Salaman had never seen before.

He had been right when he spoke of her as a beautiful woman. It was impossible that she could be under forty years old but she looked nearer twenty— even to-night when, as Mr. Chayne instantly decided, she was not at her best. He frowned a little as he noted several points which to-night she had needlessly stressed. Her mouth, a trifle wide but exquisitely shaped, was redder than usual, and her wonderful skin was whiter— almost dead white. Her eyes shone feverishly out of shadows which owed something to the art of a capable maid, and her wonderful mass of coppery hair was dressed in a style wholly new to Salaman Chayne, and quite unlike her usual style. And it seemed darker to-night. Her evening frock was much more daring than those in which she usually appeared— and these were never illiberal— and she wore big pearl earrings, a form of jewelry she usually claimed to dislike.

The meticulous Mr. Chayne frowned as he watched her.

“She’s changed herself to-night,’ he told himself. “One would say that she desired to look less like Lady Argrath, more like some star of the half-world. And she’s succeeded.”

He ran a cold eye, jealously disapproving, over her companion, but found in him nothing to hold his attention long. He was a thinnish, fair youth, probably under twentyfive, with a high, rather bulbous forehead, dim-looking bluish eyes, a little fair mustache, and a receding chin. There was something vaguely foreign in his appearance.

Salaman decided that he looked like a young German lieutenant in unfamiliar mufti, and turned again to Lady Argrath.

She was talking a good deal, very low and rather hurriedly, and her manner was touched with a certain vague and uneasy urgency— quite unlike her normal easy selfpossessed poise. She never looked away from their table.

“She’s— altogether different to-night,” said Salaman. “Why?”

He did not know and hardly attempted to guess.

"If that boneless scoundrel Dass were here no doubt he could explain it— to his own satisfaction if not to mine," said Salaman. "But I'm glad he's not here."

Mr. Chayne nodded a little to emphasize that.

He turned away, looking up as a man paused by his table. He had come so silently that Mr. Chayne was a little startled, though he gave no sign of that.

"Can you put up with me at your table, Mr. Chayne?" asked the newcomer. 'Gaspard must be making a fortune— the place is crowded."

"Very glad to see you, Kiss. You happen to be the one man I'd have chosen to share a table with to-night."

"Ah, is that so?"

The colorless, blank, lidless-looking eyes of Mr. Gregory Kiss lingered on those of Salaman Chayne for a few seconds. Except for a certain melancholy they were totally expressionless. The eyes of Mr. Kiss always were those of a sleepwalker— in appearance only.

"Is that so?" he repeated and began to stare blankly, listlessly about the restaurant.

Mr. Kiss and Salaman were old acquaintances, although Kiss was about the best private detective in town whereas Mr. Chayne's occupation, normally, was perilously akin to that of the company of free lances upon whose existence and varied activity the detective's livelihood largely depended.

In appearance Mr. Kiss was precisely and exactly like a lean, weather-worn head coachman temporarily and rather unexpectedly in evening dress. The only thing lacking in the dark, middle-aged, rather deeply lined face was a straw between the tight, thin lips.

"Why?" asked Mr. Kiss.

Salaman had seemed to hesitate. But now, his eyes on Lady Argrath, he spoke.

"I've been listening to the crazy theory of a friend of mine," he said.

Mr. Kiss nodded, his eyes on the menu.

"Crazy theory— there's a lot of those about, Mr. Chayne. How crazy was this one?"

"Oh, hopeless, hopeless," snapped Salaman. "My friend was saying that he believed the illicit drug traffic in this country was controlled by a mysterious master mind who did not look for his profits to the sale of the drug so much as to using the confidential information which his drug-taking customers gave him. It was wild, of course. All right for a novel— or a cinema film. But not in real life, eh, Kiss?"

Mr. Kiss appeared to reflect.

"Hum!" he said. "A master mind, you say, Mr. Chayne? What put that idea into your friend's head?"

But Salaman had no time for details— and less inclination. Kiss was all right— a very quiet, decent chap in his way— but he was a detective and the way of the detective was not the way of Mr. Salaman Chayne.

"Oh, Lord knows, Kiss. This chap— a man I met in the club— don't know his name— had a string of reasons, I gather. But I've forgotten 'em."

"That's a pity, Mr. Chayne," said Kiss. "For I should say that your friend is right."

"Right!"

Mr. Kiss nodded.

"Oh, yes. It's pretty well known— guessed at, anyway."

"Known? D'you mean to say that it's true— and that the man is known? Why don't they arrest him?"

"For two reasons. One is that they don't know him. They know of him. And another reason is that even if he were known he is unarrestable. They say that no ten men could arrest him. They could stop his traffic, but they could not arrest him."

Mr. Chayne bristled pugnaciously.

"Couldn't arrest him! Why the devil couldn't they arrest him?"

Mr. Kiss sighed.

"They would be dead before they could get within a yard of him. He would be dead himself, of course. He is said— rumored— to carry always a couple of bombs— flat, specially constructed bombs— and they are set with hair triggers."

"You mean he'd blow himself up and everybody near him before he would allow himself to be arrested?"

Mr. Kiss nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes, that is what I mean," he said in a voice of settled melancholy.

"But sooner or later— when they know who he is— they will get him?" asked Salaman.

Mr. Kiss shrugged and began to eat his soup.

Salaman looked at him curiously. He wondered if Mr. Kiss were after the drugmaster himself. Kiss was just the sort of queer, quiet customer to pin him, he thought— in spite of his bombs.

But he had no more time for speculation on that matter just then, for Lady Argrath had again caught his keen attention. She was leaning toward her companion, speaking very earnestly. She seemed to be making some request to which the fair-haired youth, frowning, would only respond with little shakes of the head and tiny shruggings of the shoulder.

Mr. Chayne watched intently. And the melancholy Mr. Kiss watched him, as well as Lady Argrath.

Presently Kiss spoke again.

“A sad thing about Sir James Argrath.”

“Sad? What do you mean?”

“Argrath failed for a quarter of a million this afternoon. It’s in the last editions of the papers.”

Salaman’s eyes narrowed.

“Argrath failed!” He scowled ferociously. "Why, they said he was a millionaire— and a pretty careful one at that.”

“Fim! Well, it hasn’t helped him much. He failed—awkwardly, too. There are suggestions of— um— mistakes. Shouldn’t be surprised to hear that he’s been arrested!” Mr. Chayne’s scowl deepened as he watched Argrath’s wife.

What was she doing out— almost in gala attire— to-night? The evening of a day on which one’s husband fails “awkwardly” for a quarter of a million is not usually selected by a normal wife as an evening for being out.

But even as the well-marked brows of the little man knitted over the problem, Lady Argrath and her companion rose to leave.

Salaman Chayne made up his mind quickly. He would follow them. It might be quite simple. If the fair youth put her in a taxi and ordered the driver to her home he, Salaman, would join her and look in for a few moments to commiserate with his cousin. If she did not go home it might be as well to know where she was going and why.

Without flurry he paid his bill, said “Au revoir” to the melancholy Mr. Kiss, and leaving that gentleman rapt in intent study of the menu, he went, with his peculiar, jaunty, cocky walk, out of Gaspard’s.

Lady Argrath and her escort had not taken a taxi. It was a glorious summer evening, just cool enough to be refreshing, and wherever the couple were bound they clearly intended walking. It was at once evident that Lady Argrath was not yet returning to her home.

Salaman followed them— behind one of his biggest cigars. Behind the unconscious Salaman followed a lean, tall, soft-footed man exactly like a slightly dyspeptic head coachman lacking a straw for his mouth— the melancholy Mr. Kiss.

Ten minutes later Salaman was bending over the lock of a door in a small, rather secluded block of flats somewhere between the south end of Charing Cross Road and St. Martin’s Lane.

Lady Argrath and her escort had disappeared into the flat guarded by the lock of that door.

There was a queer, secret, rather ugly atmosphere about that house and Salaman had been quick to feel it. A place dimly lit, secretive, and though well-fitted and clean, boding and suggestive of dark and ill-omened things. It was oddly silent there, also, and the roll of traffic west and south reached him only as a far-off murmur. It was well chosen for one needing a secret rendezvous, thought Salaman Chayne, and with the thought he was instantly aware that this was the note of the place.

A place of rendezvous— mysterious, furtive, a dark corner— needing no hall porter because none ever came here who was not perfectly well acquainted with it. The sweet scent used by Creuse Argrath still lingered on the warm close air.

A man's voice was suddenly raised inside the flat.

Salaman listened for a second.

"Why— it's James Argrath! What are they doing here?"

His face was set in a look of sheer amazement.

Argrath was almost shouting— it sounded as if he, this quiet, reserved, excessively controlled man, was indulging in a furious burst of reproach, of upbraiding.

Salaman's slender, steely fingers hovered about the lock with gentle, delicate, groping, tentative movements and a small, shining instrument of metal showed for an instant. Then the door opened a little, absolutely without sound. Mr. Chayne understood locks of all descriptions, though few guessed it.

He stepped inside, soundless as a cat.

In a room on his right two people were quarreling furiously— Sir James Argrath and his wife. Salaman Chayne listened, craning close to the door.

Argrath was shouting, but, from where he now stood, the listener could glean that the predominant note in his cousin's voice was less of anger than despair.

"If you had been my worst enemy instead of my wife you could not have done me a greater injury or contrived a more infamous treachery!" he was saying in a high, shrill voice that was not free from a vibration of anguish. "Why did you do it?"

The voice of Lady Argrath cut in chill, composed, very clear.

"I don't understand. Put that pistol away. I will not listen or talk to you an instant longer if you threaten violence. Put it away— point it away—"

Mr. Chayne judged it time to interfere. He turned the handle of the door and entered swiftly, neatly.

It was a well-furnished apartment of considerable size and the Argraths were standing in the middle of it, facing each other. The man had an automatic

pistol in his hand— drawn back as though he had snatched it back from an attempt to knock it from his hand.

"Good God! What are you two trying to do?" snapped Salaman.

They turned swiftly— the woman was the quickest— looking down at him, startled.

Argrath spoke first, letting his pistol hand fall to his side.

"Ah, you, is it, Chayne?"

"You— what are you doing here? How did you get in here?" broke in Lady Argrath eying him keenly, her beautiful face suddenly sharp and, for a moment, cruel with suspicion.

Salaman shrugged, but before he could speak Argrath went on heavily. His normally pleasant face was intensely pale save for two feverishly flaring red patches high up above his cheek bones; he was unshaven, still in his City clothes, and his eyes were shockingly bloodshot. His mouth seemed oddiy twisted.

"Listen to me, Salaman, and I'll tell you what I'm trying to tell this woman— this wife of mine—this drug slave and traitress— the result of the crime— the crimes— she has committed against me. It seems that she hates me— has hated me for a long time— because she believes I have been ungenerous to her in money matters. She says that— but it is not true. She hates me, yes, but she hates every one else who does not administer to her insane craving for the drugs that have destroyed her— the drugs she came here to-night to get!"

He laughed, hysterically.

"God, what I have been through— what I have suffered— how I have worked and overworked— wrung my brains for twenty hours of the day for months. A circus horse, Salaman, that's what I've been— going round and round in a circle— never getting anywhere. Oh, I'll explain. Keep quiet, Creuse, damn you!" He menaced the woman with the pistol.

"No— stand back, will you, Chayne? It's not for her, this little toy— it's for me presently. Look at her, Salaman— she doesn't believe it. We'll see about that. She's cool enough about it— eh? Keyed up with her infernal drugs. That's it, keyed up—"

Salaman Chayne stepped nearer, intending to try to quiet him, but he saw that. Argrath was quick now and perceptive with the darting uncanny perception of the fey.

"Listen, I say— be still, you leopardess, your turn will come! I'm speaking now. Listen— listen and leave me alone or I'll go down to Trafalgar Square and yell the truth to the crowd there. I'm ruined, Salaman—ll've failed to-day for a quarter of a million cold— eh, a quarter of a million! *I*! James Argrath who used to keep big companies spinning in the air like a juggler— only easier. A year

ago I was caught in a bit of a squeeze— nothing but a squeeze— a temporary thing. Every business man gets that. It's nothing— if one is not surrounded by traitors— hasn't a traitress on his own hearth, in his own home. It was necessary to economize for a little— only for a little while. She wouldn't help. You see, she'd only married me for the money I had and when that was gone there was nothing to keep her loyal. And she was already a drug slave—even then. I begged her to be patient, but these drug eaters don't understand what patience is. She continued to waste money like water— what she did with it God knows— it went. She kept coming for more and I had to refuse. I hadn't the money and I needed all my credit in the City— every ounce of it. I begged her to wait patiently and I confided in her my great coup; there was a big concession going on the west coast of Africa— no, not oil, but gold country— gold and a great chance of radium. It was a fortune— and it was mine— should have been mine. At the eleventh hour I was forestalled, Salaman. Why? Because that woman had sold me out to— some one. Probably some sly, stealthy, unseen brute that supplied her with drugs— eh? Something special in the way of drugs. She had told him— or somebody. They stepped in and forestalled me on that concession. Eh? What do you think of that— a man's own wife— the very woman he was toiling for? Of course I never guessed. I hung on— working like an insane thing— and made, forced, another chance— a patent, this time; a big wireless improvement— a fortune. You'll hear of it yet. I told her of it one night— to help out, to help her to wait—as men do tell their wives things. I was forestalled again. My inventor man was bought away from me. Ske had betrayed me again. Why? What for? Good God, it was mainly for her I was struggling! Three times that happened. It was like pouring water— no, blood— my own blood— into a bottomless vessel. I fought for chances, half killed myself for chances, won them, shared my relief with my own wife— and lost my chance. Sold out! And I took risks, bad risks, and the police are— will soon be— after me. Oh, I understand things now. I know now. It came to me one night like an inspiration. I had her watched— my man tracked her here to this flat. It's here— but there's one— the big one— that my man hasn't been able to get sight of— as silent, and swift and cunning as a snake. Dragour! That's his name. I've learned that, Chayne. Dragour— eh, what a name for the reptile such a man must be! I've come here to kill him— but he's slipped me. Dragour—"

"Kill him! You kill him! You would find it easier and more profitable to kill yourself!" said the beautiful drug slave, facing him, her brilliant eyes as cold as her voice was cruel.

It was clear that she hated him— as clear as it was that she had injured him irreparably.

Argrath stared stupidly, pierced by something in her tone.

"Creuse, you meant that— you would like that?" he said in a strange, almost wailing voice.

She stared at him levelly, her eyes merciless.

"Very few ruined gamblers have the courage to do that, and you are not one of them. It would chime admirably with my mood if you were!" she said— and even as she spoke Salaman Chayne was conscious of the set deliberation of her tone. She, too, was possessed— she knew that Argrath would take up her icy challenge. And, magically, eerily, Chayne knew it also. Ar grath had loved her— and he had reached or been driven to a point, where it needed only this from her. He was at the very brink of the abyss— she could have pulled him back with a word, a gesture. But she had thrust him down.

"Ah— you say that, do you?" shouted Argrath in a terrible voice, hoarse and broken— swung the pistol to his head and fired.

A sudden red stain, a splash, a flower of blood, appeared like magic on the shimmering silk of her dress, just above her heart.

Sir James Argrath collapsed in a queer, limp crumbling heap—a dreadful sight.

Salaman Chayne, glaring, sick, stabbed a lean finger at the soulless creature facing him.

"You— you knew he would do that! You knew! You have murdered him. But for you— for what you said he would not have done that."

Her eyes, blazing with an infamous excitement, looked suddenly beyond him, dilating widely, and she stepped back.

"I will bear witness to the truth of that," said a voice gravely over Salaman's shoulder. The little man glanced round.

It was Mr. Gregory Kiss who spoke, mysteriously, soundlessly appearing from nowhere.

The woman moved back toward a curtain at the other side of the room.

"That man killed himself," she said. "Don't dare to accuse me."

Mr. Chayne stepped toward her.

"You goaded him to the deed, and it can be proved."

She laughed wickedly, as cold-blooded as she was fair.

"Proof! Proof! Do you imagine I am without a witness of this mad suicide?" she said.

"You will be detained—" began Kiss quietly.

She tore aside the curtain, laughing acidly.

"Hold these men, Dragour," she said, swaying back.

The black muzzle of a big pistol seemed to shoot over her bare shoulder like the head of some huge viper, and behind the weapon was the face of

Dragour, the Drugmaster— a dark and bitter face, stamped with the unholy hall mark of a thousand evil deeds and appalling thoughts— a face malign and cold and frightful, like a dark mask, set with two black eyes that stared with a fixed, bitter and unchanging stare at the two startled men by the body of Sir James Argrath.

For a full second all three stood perfectly still, like wax figures—almost as though they would never move.

Then the full, rich voice of the woman broke on the silence— slow, musical, but intolerably insolent.

"You see, do you not? The devil takes care of his own!"

She laughed.

A black void seemed to yawn behind Dragour and the woman, they moved swiftly and even as Salaman Chayne leaped toward them the secret door crashed to.

Mr. Chayne tore down the curtain, but there was neither key nor handle visible on that door. If it opened from the inside at all it was evidently by the manipulation of some concealed device.

Pallid with fury Salaman turned on Mr. Kiss.

But that one, already at the telephone, shook his head.

"It was a bolt hole," he said quietly. "They are away. Dragour has a thousand exits. Nobody can expect to catch him in a cul-de-sac at the first attempt. All in good time, Chayne— all in good time."

He began to call up the police.

Mr. Chayne dropped on his knees to examine the dead man.

But that was quite useless. Sir James Argrath had made no mistake in the carrying out of his final coup.

Salaman rose, staring about the room. As yet he was conscious of no sense of loss or pity, only of a cold and inexorable anger. He scowled in his effort to memorize everything in that room perfectly. He needed to remember as much as he could— for he had long since learned that everything, every little microscopic detail seemed ever to serve as valuable data to the prehensile brain of his remarkable partner Kotman Dass.

He wished he could telephone to that mountainous man to come and see the place for himself— but there was no hope of that.

Nothing on earth would induce Kotman Dass to enter that room until every sign of the tragedy was removed.

All that Mr. Salaman Chayne could do was to incise his memory with details for Dass, and painfully retail these to his partner when presently the police should have finished questioning him and Mr. Kiss.

And so, swearing to himself that he would never rest, never cease his search for, nor abandon the trail of the drugmaster until that living pest was taken— alive or dead— Salaman settled down to await the arrival of the police.

“They'll be here any minute,” said Mr.

Kiss quietly, and began softly to prowl about the apartment, peering, it seemed to Salaman, at everything, but touching nothing.

Mr. Chayne watched him in silence.

“He may be— I think he is— a good man, but Dass and I will prove the better bloodhounds,” said Salaman, and shrugged, eying the still figure on the floor. "We shall see.”

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2: Generous George

Earl Derr Biggers

1884-1933

Illustrated Sunday Magazine, 29 Dec 1912

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"GENEROSITY," said Mr. Peter Powers, leaning toward me in the silence of the rathskeller, "is your strong point, and that's how you come to remind me o' George Barber. George was the most generous man I ever see, though you're a close second, and who knows but you'll beat him out in the end? Yes, thanks—I will. You're very kind. But George, he was a wonder. Every payday he acted more and more like Carnegie, only he never wasted no money on libraries. It was a real pleasure to sit near him in a cafe, with a good spry waiter close at hand. Yes, sir, you remind me o° George in a good many ways. He didn't have a very intelligent face, but he knew enough not to have heart failure whenever the waiter brought the checks."

He imbibed.

"It's long since I seen poor George," he went on feelingly. "Three long years sinee the time him an' me tried to get rid o' a thousand sewin'machines that had come into our lives accidental like. Unusual machines they was, too, always causin' trouble, an' before we got 'em off our hands we'd kidnapped half the female population o' a little New England town. Mebbe you'd like to hear about it?"

I consulted my pocket, and again nodded to the waiter. With this slight encouragement Mr. Powers began:

ON ONE of the big North River docks in New York I struck old George Barber, always so jolly an' gay; an' the look in his eyes was sad an' his smile o° greeting was the kind that does service at funerals.

"I'm in trouble, Peter," he says to me low an' tearful.

"I'm sorry, George," says I, with the true ring in my voice, for I thought he was broke, and to meet the most generous man you know and find out that he has no money is the most mutual sorrow there is.

"See that fancy yacht." he says, pointin' to the harbor. And there, right in among the dirty tugs and tramp steamers and the like, was the prettiest little boat afloat. Her brasses an' awnings flashed in the sun, an' she was puffing an' snorting an' turning up her nose at the craft around her for all the world like Mrs. Van Dusen visiting the poorhouse.

"Ain't she the beauty?" I remarks.

George sighed. "I'm in command," he says.

I STARTED to congratulate him, but he got behind the post he had been leaning against, and held up his hand. "Don't." says he. "That would be the last straw. On board that there yacht is the cause o' all my worry. Peter Powers, if you'd told me when last we met that my generosity an' kind nature was goin' to get me in all this trouble I'd a turned different on the spot."

"I'm glad I didn't then," I says heartily.

"Yes," he answers, "I suppose it was better to let me live in ignorance, but it was a awful blow when it fell." He leans toward me. "Come on board," he whispers, like the villain in the show, "We might be heard here. Come an' I'll tell you the story o' my life."

He was rowed out to the yacht, an' once in the cabin, I was pleased to see that George was himself again, for I had only just set down when he put some bottles an' glasses on the table. That was George— that was the secret o' his generosity. The trouble he was in, the story he had to tell—or the someone else was tellin'— never got him so interested he fergot the liquid refreshment. Well, we set down, an' George took up his sad, sad story.

SIX MONTHS ago, (he says,) I was a happy man— first mate of a tramp steamer carryin' bananas between a lot o' little South American republics an' New York. Then one day a rich general down there in the tropic climes got the idee that he ought to be president o' the pink spot on the map called his country. He an' our captain met; money talked, as is its habit; an when next we left New York it was with ten thousand rifles stowed away below, in the name o' Liberty as represented by the general. Everything had been arranged by his agents; all we did was to take the boxes from a shady wharf on a dark night an' hide 'em away from anxious eves. So we steamed south, to aid and abet a Humpty Dumpty president at havin' a grea' fall.

But he didn't. Oh, it's a sad tale. We anchored two miles up a forsaken, smelly river one moonlight night, an' saw the ragged army o tyrant stanglers camped on the shore. The general lent talk to the unloading— he was a fat man full o' whiskey an' excitement. When the boxes was all ashore he grabbed an ax an' mounted one o' them. Downin' tyrants was his subject; that an' givin' Liberty a fair field. Also he mentioned that he had waited long fer them rifles. A fuzzy atmosphere was crawlin' into our lungs and choking us, so we told him to cut it short. Then he opened a box, an' next he swore— in Spanish."

Well, Peter, there ain't no use makin o' mystery o' it. Inside that box was a neat little sewin' machine. Inside the next ten, twenty, thirty up to one

thousand boxes the general began openin' they was sewin'-machines. Don't ask me how they got there— I don't know. The general sat down on a box and cried, an' between sobs he asked us what we thought he was runnin'— a sewin'-circle or a war. Our captain tried to tell him they was a new kind o' machine gun, but the old boy wouldn't be cheered. .

"This ain't no woman's war," he says.

"Well," says Murry, the captain, "it was pretty dark that night on the wharf. An' these look a lot like the boxes we was told to take on. They was a few more than we expected, but we thought you couldn't have too many— er— rifles."

At mention o' that word the general stood up an' drew on his vocabulary fer some o' the choicest words I ever hear used. Then he set down an' cried some more.

"You fight too much in these blame picture-book countries, anyhow," says Murry, mad about the names. "Sometime when I can afford it I'm goin' to take a day off an' spank this seat of war. It's muddy hee,' he goes on, 'an' I don't like the cries of the birds an' beasts, nor the wild, wet breeze comin' up from the swamp. I believe I'm ecatchin' cold. I'm goin' back on board.'

The general grabs him. "The rifles?" he inquires.

"I'm sorry," says Murry, who'd got most of his pay for the job before startin' in, "I'm very sorry, but someone else probably has 'em now. An' it wouldn't be safe to inquire. Keep the machines,' he says, 'they'll come in handy round the camp. Rainy days when it's too wet to fight let the men stay at home an' do a little dress-makin'. They need new clothes," he says.

Two minutes thinkin' convinced the general that revolutions were too expensive just then, an' that he'd better wait till they was cheaper. He tells his army to go home an' ferget it, in a sort of a mushy speech. We took him an' the machines to the capital city, where he got back his job o' Secretary of War, with no questions asked. He's there now, quietly waitin' fer a chance to shoot the president under the table at 2 cabinet meeting.

THAT, sir, is the story George had to tell, an' as he stopped to fill my glass I says to him: "George," I says, "what has all this to do with you an' your trouble?"

"My trouble," says George, "is that I'm too generous. Them sewin'-machines— a thousand of 'em— are on board this yacht. In a evil minute, urged on by my kindness o' heart an' a offer of a third what I get fer 'em, I agreed to come up here in the general's yacht an' sell 'em off fer him."

"Well, why don't you?" I says.

"Why don't I?" answers George, with tears in his eyes. "That's it, why don't I? A thousand white elephants on board this yacht would be easier disposed of.

A thousand diamond tiaras disappearin' from a New York wharf wouldn't have caused more stir among the police. The government has taken charge of the rifles, an' now they're lookin' fer the machines. They want everything. As sure as I steal into a city an' get ready fer bargain day on the yacht, the newspapers come out with big headlines about new clues in the case. Why don't they fergit it? Aint there no other news but lost sewin'-machines?" .

"The thing to do," I says, slow an' careful, "is to go somewhere an' sell them machines to somebody."

George looks disappointed. "I'd got that far myself," he says.

"Yes," I says, "but you ain't been usin' common sense in carryin' out the plan. You've been tryin' to sell what I suppose a cruel justice calls stolen goods in the land o' are lights an' cafes, where crime is wrote large in the headlines, an' there's suspicion in the eye of your brother if you ask him the time. It's the simple life fer yours. It's some little village alone an' forgotten by the sea, where hearts js. unsuspecting, an' manners an' customs— especially customs— ain't too exactin'."

"You're right, Peter," says George, "you're right."

"OF course I am," says I, "an' I know the place, too. Up on the Maine coast they's a little town called Grimport that even the Lord thinks has toppled off into the sea. What ails you, George?"

"I've heard of it," says George, choking over his drink.

"That's queer," says I. "I didn't suppose any man on earth had heard of it but me."

"A— friend— of mine onct lived there," says George.

"No friend o' mine has lived there, or ever could, an' still be a friend," I says, "But here's my plan. Why not run up there fer one day, pass round bills in the mornin' invitin' all ladies to come on board in the afternoon an' view the machines we're almost givin' away, sell all we can, deliver 'em an' collect the money, an' then flit away before suspicion wakes? I'll go with you, George. I'm out of a berth, un' I always did like to be near you, anyhow."

George's gratitude at my offering to go along was touchin' to see, an' he hunts up the crew, orderin' them to start at once. We steamed away north, an' all that night George sat up in the cabin, deef to the swearin' of the mate, writin' advertisements of sewin'-machines that was artistic triumphs. He said the machines was bought by a missionary society for the heathen in Africa, but when they was delivered the heathen wouldn't have them, because they didn't like to sew, and didn't wear clothes, anyhow.

One o' the crew that was onct a sign painter in San Francisco printed George's ads on ten big boards' an' the morning we got to Grimport we took 'em ashore an' put 'em up where they couldn't help bein' seen. I tried to get

George to tie up to the docks, but he was set on anchorin' out in the harbor. We could get under way quicker if anything happened, he said, an' he was so afraid of trouble that he went ashore an' hired a waterman to carry the ladies to and from the yacht, not wantin' to use our own boat fer the purpose.

AT ONE O'CLOCK that afternoon we set down to wait fer customers. George was a little nervous about the outcome of the plan, so I cheers him up a bit.

"Think o' it," I says. "In this deserted village there's over a thousand women heartsick and hungerin' fer a bargain sale. Few, if any. have come into their lives. An' now we bring 'em their heart's desire on bourd a yacht. Why, George, they'l] flock here like— like birds. We'll be hailed as public benefactors. They'll build us a statue at the mouth of this harbor."

"Under water," growls George.

"You wait an' see," I tells him.

GEORGE waited and he saw. I wish I could describe the scene that followed. If I had one more drink mebbe I could. Thank you— much obliged. The first trip the waterman made he brought five women, an' pretty soon lady shoppers was thicker on that deck than in a department store the day before Christmas. George got out some of the machines, an' some of the ladies who had brought along implements fer sewing set down and sewed, accordin' to George's offer in the ads. You won't guess what a pretty scene it made, with the ladies talkin' a blue streak and the machines a-buzzin', an' George's head buzzin' too, because of the questions they asked.

One by one they came an' ordered an' went away. I could hear George sayin': "Yes'm, pay on delivery tonight," an' then he'd come over to where I was sittin' by the rail and punch me like he was ringin' up the sale on a cash register, an' shriek low fer joy. "Another gone," he'd say, "Peter, this is your work, God bless you!"

It began to get late, an' the crowd thinned out. They was just five left, a aged lady with green specs, a old maid who wouldn't have been satisfied with a solid gold machine set with dinmonds, a butcher's wife whose social standin' wouldn't allow her' to buy nothin' inferior, an' two young married: women who couldn't decide. George comes over to me.

"Two hundred an' eighty-three sold," he says. "If you'd a' told me yesterday such luck was waitin' fer me, I'd a' jammed the lie down your throat. Tonight I'll be a rich man. Two hundred an' eighty-three, and mebbe some more."

"Yes, mebbe some more," I says, "fer here comes the waterman with another customer."

GEORGE smiled an' says: "That's good." He turned to look at the waterman's skiff, not a hundred yards away. Then his face went white an' he trembled all over. At that minute the waterman's passenger, a tall, homely woman, stood up in the stern of the boat and made some remarks, éemphasizin' her words by wavin' a umbrella vigorously.

"Good Lord," says George in a broken voice, "she's seen me."

"Well, why not?" says I, surprised.

"Why not?" shrieked George. "Why not, you fool? She's my wife, that's why not."

"You never told me," I says sadly.

"This ain' no time fer family history," he Says, an' rushes below. I followed. The engineer was right there, but George didn't notice him. He started the yacht himself.

"Look here," I hollered, "they's five women aboard this bdat what belong ashore. Are you mad, George?"

"No," says George, "I'm doin' the only snane thing, as you'd know if you'd ever met my wife. Eight years ago, I left her, an' she's been after me eyer since. Once she gets me, l'm a goner. I was a fvol fer comin' to this town; she used to live here when she was a girl. Go up on the bridge an' keep her headed to sea, Jim," he says to one o' the men.

"Where are we goin'?" I asks.

"Siberia, Hindoostan, Algiers, anywhere," says George. "Anywhere, I ain't sure where," he says. "I only know we're goin' an' we're goin' quick."

"Well, put on your armor," I says, "an' we'll go up on deck."

I THINK I need another drink to describe the scene that met our eyes there. Thanks. Have you ever faced five cryin'-mad' women you've just kidnapped? No? Well, I guess they ain't no use tryin' to give you any idee o' the way they acted.

"Be calm, ladies, be calm," says George, in his softest tones. "This is a accident, an' we're all sorry, I'm sure."

The old lady with green specs stopped cryin' to seream:

"Pirates! Pirates! I knew it from the very first. It seemed all along something was wrong. I suppose we're bein' carried off to be piratesses. But I won't be one. I'll die first!"

"Yes, I guess you will," says George, tryin' to cheer things up a bit.

"Listen to that," shricked the old lady, "he's goin' to kill us! I knew it. Take us back, you monster!"

George tried to explain, but explainin' to angry women is like expostulatin' with a storm at sea; The names they called him wasn't exactly profane, but they sounded less polite, someow.

When we'd gone about three miles down the eoast I took George aside.

"Your wife cant follow you here," I says, "an' I can't listen to this commotion much longer an' stay in my right mind. Why not stop an' put these women ashore in a boat? They can walk back to Grimport before night."

George said it was the best plan, an' he told the ladies so. As he was linin' 'em up ready to lower 'em into the ship's boat, his generosity came to the front again

"I've caused you some inconvenience, ladies," he says. "No, you can't deny it— don't try. So I'm goin to' make each o' you a nice little present. With each lady put ashore goes one o' our latest-model, light-runnin' sewin'-machines. When I'm far away— an' I'll be far away as I can get, you ean bet on that," he says, thinkin' o' his wife, "you can look at the machines an' remember George Barber, the man that carried you away by accident—"

"Cut it out," says the butcher's wife. "It's gettin' late."

So the crew put 'em ashore in the hoat, an' followed 'em with five o' our best machines. They made a pretty picture, standin' on the sand, each one beside a sewin'-machine, an' utterin' female curses on George's head. We steamed away, an' George said it almost broke his heart to leave 'em. But I reminded him o' his wife. an' he was comforted.

We'd gone about a quarter o' a mile when George came rushin' to me, a glass in his hand. "Peter," he says, "bad luck don't come single. They've got us now, or my name ain't George Barber."

"Who's got us," I asked, "the ladies?"

"The law," whispers George, in hoarse tones. An' he points with shakin' finger toward a revenue cutter speedin' along through the dusk, blowin' bushels o' smoke from its funnels, an' throwin' its searchlight, like some evil eye, over the waters.

"It's been nothin' but trouble, trouble," says George sadly, "ever since I took charge o' these blamed machines. An' now it's six years hard labor fer us all." He fell over a machine an' instead o' swearin' stops to think. "They's one way out," he says, excited like. "They's one way to save us yet." An' he picks up a machine an' throws it overboard. "Call the crew," he shouts. "This is the only way." We all got to work, not relishing George's picture o' prison stripes, an' pretty soon we'd thrown nine hundred and ninety-five perfectly good machines into the deep blue sea.

THE cutter comes nearer an' nearer. George finds it harder an' harder to breathe. Then she turns her light on us fer a second— just a contemptuous glance in passin'— an' flashes by. George's face wits a sight to see, even in the dusk.

"They never stopped," he says softly.

"That's clear," says I "they went right by."

"Fifty thousand dollars worth o' sewin' machines," he murmurs, "thrown to the mermaids."

"It's a shame," says I. "But the mermaids need—"

"A third o' the money mine," he goes on, "an' a excitable general waitin' in South America fer his share of the proceeds."

"What's the answer?" I says.

We steamed on southward, a sad lot. I asked to be put ashore here at New York, an' George gave in, against his will. When I said goodbye, he told me his plan. He was goin' to show the general the newspaper clippings of how the police was on our track.

THE story of our brave fight, as I have thought it out," says George, "is a touching one. For a hundred miles we raced the fastest revenue cutter in America. Brought to bay at last, we were forced to throw overboard our treasure, in order to save our lives. All is lost, my dear general, save honor and the yacht."

"I hope he'll be good to you," I says, "as good us you deserve. Goodbye. Good-bye, George. I hate to leave you."

"AND SO," finished Mr. Peter Powers, "me and George Barber parted for the last time. It's been three long years since I seen him, and him the most generous man I know. No, you haven't beat him out; I'd like to say you had, but loyalty to poor old George won't let me."

I said good-bye to poor old George's faithful friend, and started out. Near the door I met a waiter I knew.

"Who is this Peter Powers?" I asked.

The waiter smiled. "He's a carpenter," he said, "and he lives over in Jersey."

"But he's been on the water a great deal," I protested.

"Ferry boats," returned the man. "Twice a day— morning and night. And maybe on the swan boats in Central Park."

———————

3: Hour of Peril

Booth Tarkington

1869-1946

Cosmopolitan, July 1930

DURING THE WINTER my friend Mr. Massey of Logansville, Illinois, had bought the large summer cottage that he and his family had occupied as tenants through several previous seasons at Mary's Neck, a salt-washed promontory of the New England coast. My own habitation is at Cobble Reef only a few miles distant, and I expected a call from him early in the season, as I am a native of his own part of the country and on that account he has the habit of talking over with me matters concerned with life upon these shores so far from the familiar Midlands. He did not come to see me, however, until an afternoon well along in July; he explained that he had been kept busy by some alterations of his cottage, and also by a new sport in which he had begun to indulge himself, and he added, with some ruefulness, that this new expression of middle-aged liveliness might nearly have been the death of him. Upon that, I settled myself to listen, and thereafter said nothing more until he had finished.

A MAN'S FAMILY of only a wife and two daughters (he said) probably strikes you as a fairly small one; but the minute Mrs. Massey and Clarissa and Enid found we actually owned this property at Mary's Neck they began to seem pretty numerous to me, their ideas for enlargements and changes being on what you might call the grand scale. Well, I won't go into it except to say that there's been considerable argument and a good deal of carpentering, both kind of wearing on a man that likes a peaceful summer.

Naturally Mrs. Massey's ideas were more moderate than Clarissa's and Enid's; all she wanted were larger pantries, an extension of the kitchen, an enclosed laundry yard and a garden. There are a couple of acres of ground behind the cottage; she'd always wanted to use some of that land for a nice flower garden, and now she was going to do it, she said. Well, it seemed fair, so I told her to go ahead, thinking it would look well in me to give her this permission because she was already going ahead anyhow without asking for it.

I anticipated she might have a little trouble finding a gardener. You see, as long as we rented the cottage we always had this Zebias Flick as a general handy man; he went with the place, being the winter caretaker, and he kept the grass cut and weeds out of the. graveled walk and driveway— to some extent— and was supposed to look after the ashes and do a little window washing and so forth.

I was pretty sure Zebias wouldn't care to add gardening to his other duties at any price; but Mrs. Massey said it wouldn't do any harm to ask him, so she

did. He just looked at her a long time, ate a couple of spears of grass and said he'd been thinking of laying off work entirely for the summer in order to rest himself.

Zebias doesn't talk much— at least not where a summer person can hear him— and it nearly always takes him a long time to get ready to say anything at all. He's like most of the cther original inhabitants of Mary's Neck in this; eternal vigilance seems to be their watchword in their intercourse with the summer peopte, and when you find an exception it startles you.

WELL, as it happens, the only exception I've encountered so far is the gardener Zebias found for Mrs. Massey— she didn't know where to look for one herself, so after quite a little pressure on her part Zebias said he wasn't sure that he didn't know somebody who'd be willing to give the position a try, and a few mornings later the person he'd induced to consent to make the trial began work in the back yard under Mrs. Massey's direction.

She'd had about half an acre plowed up and fertilized by a farmer Zebias had hired for her, and also she had on hand two or three truckloads of young plants from greenhouses over at Lodgeport, besides a gallon or so of seeds from mailorder houses. You see, she was going at the thine in earnest, and from where I was sitting by an open window in my own room upstairs, I could hear how brisk and interested her voice was sounding in the yard.

I could hear another voice, too, a high-pitched one that struck me as about the nasalest and twangiest I'd ever heard in my life, and it seemed to be going on most of the time and usually in a surprised way.

"Hee-uh?" it would say, and I've heard that expression often enough in these parts to know it's meant for the word "here." "Hee-uh? You mean you want them little bushes lugged right hee-uh? Well, if 'twas me I wouldn't do it," I could hear this funny, twangy voice saying. "Hee-uh? You want them seeds stuck in hee-uh? Well, if they was mine I wouldn't do it. What I'd do with this gaddin if 'twas mine, I'd plant me 'bout eight nice, good rows o' potatoes and the rest I'd put into nice, good tunnips and cabbages, somethin' you'd git pleasure out of later on. Course, though, it's yours and you know what you want. 'Tain't my responsibil'ty, so I'll take and do what you say. If you tell me to I'll do it; but if 'twas me I wouldn't. You mean you want 'em hee-uh?"

I could hear Mrs. Massey telling him she did, and sometimes she seemed to be calling the new gardener by name; but it struck me she said it in a lowered voice as if there were something peculiar about it or she didn't like to come right out with it, so to speak. Our daughters must have been listening, too, because they referred to this critically at luncheon, which was rather an open-air meal, as you might say, on account of the carpenters' having torn off the

bay window of the dining room that morning without putting anything in its place.

Mrs. Massey didn't mind that; she was flushed and warm with her gardening in the sunshine, and appeared to be pleased with the way things were going though the girls' criticism embarassed her slightly.

"What on earth were you calling that man, Mother?" Clarissa asked her. "It sounded too silly!"

"Why, no," Mrs. Massey said. "It was just his name. It's an odd name, just as many of the names about here are, especially in the countryside, away from the village. He comes from a little settlement two or three miles from Mary's Neck and he seems a very good man indeed, though he hasn't had much experience with flowers, I'm afraid. Zebias says that he's the best to be had and that he's entirely reliable and honest, and I get that impression myself; besides, it's pleasant to find a 'native' who's talkative and affable."

"Altogether perfectly equipped as a gardener!" Enid remarked, with a touch of sarcasm, you might infer. "We were speaking of his name and we'd better learn what it is since we may have occasion to use it ourselves sometime. Just what was it you were calling him, Mother?"

"Prinsh," Mrs. Massey told her, and looked disturbed. "When he told me his full name I thought that was the best thing to call him. It's his middle name."

"It sounded perfectly horrible!" Clarissa said, and she took a severe tone with her mother. "I heard you calling him that, and I couldn't believe my ears! I heard you saying, 'Where's the rake, Prinsh?' and calling, 'Oh, Prinsh!' when he was in the tool house, and 'Prinsh' this and 'Prinsh' that, and I did hope the carpenters weren't listening because it sounded as though his name were 'Prince' and you were tight and couldn't speak distinctly. It won't do, Mother!"

"Well, it's better than anything else," Mrs. Massey said, getting redder, and naturally both girls demanded to know what she meant by that. "I mean better than his other names," she explained. "When he came this morning the first thing he said was that he was the man Zebias Flick had hired for the summer to do gardening here, and then he said, 'I'm Mr. Sweetmus.' "

"What!" both the girls exclaimed together.

"Mr. Sweetmus," their mother told them. "I didn't think of it right away; but the first time I called him that without the 'Mister'—"

"I heard you!" Clarissa interrupted. "I'd have thought you were looking for one of us, or even for Father, except that it was so unlike your ordinary vocabulary. How often did you call this man 'Sweetmus' and who heard you?"

"NEVER MIND," Mrs. Massey told her. "I saw at once it wouldn't do because it's so difficult to distinguish between the sounds of 'M' and 'N' at a little distance. So I asked him what the rest of his name was, and he said he didn't like to be called by his first name, though it was a Bible name. There are two Ananiases in the Bible and when his family named him they meant the other one; but strangers never understood that and it had been a burden to him at times. I thought he was right, too; it would be unjust to call him by a name he objected to, and then he told me that his middle name was Prinsh, which was his mother's family name. So I thought the simplest thing to do was to call him that, though after I'd done so a few times I— ah— ah—"

"Rather!" Clarissa said. "There's only one thing to do and that's to go back to the way he introduced himself, which is certainly what he wanted. I've noticed that the most tactful summer people and those the natives like the best use the word 'Mister' frequently addressing the original Mary's Neckers in their employ. He called himself 'Mr. Sweetmus'; as you say, you can't possibly call him 'Ananias,' and unless you want the neighbors to think you've been drinking you can't go all over the place shouting, 'Oh, Prinsh!' any more. If we put in the 'Mister,' there isn't much danger of people's thinking we've gone crazy enough to call a person who looks like your new gardener 'sweetness'! I do wish, though, that one or two of Father's middle-aged men friends here could have heard him calling him that just once!"

"Never mind," I told her. "We'll call him 'Mr. Sweetmus,' of course; it's settled."

"I hope so," Enid said, getting up. "He's certainly a sight!"

This word of description interested me, for I hadn't been able to get a clear view of Mr. Sweetmus from my window, so, after luncheon, I went out to look him over. He was a fat, middle-aged man— pretty bald, because you could see a half-moon between his hair and his old straw hat—and the upper rim of his greenish old trousers didn't look as if it was going to stay much longer on the lower slopes of his gingham shirt that was bulging out above it.

He had a shiny brown face, puffed cheeks and eyebrows that looked like the scatterings of a longish mustache. He seemed glad to see me.

"Guess you must be Mr. Massish," he said, stopping work at once and holding out his hand. "Pleased to make your 'quaintance."

I shook hands with him and told him that my name was Massey; but information on this point had no weight with him, then or at any other time.

"Nice place you got here, Mr. Massish," he went on. "Mrs. Massish, she seems a nice lady, too, I expect, once I git used to her, maybe. Well, breeze sou'west but looks like holdin' fair. Too early to say so now, bein' it's only June, but looks like, come September, we might git a good, nice Indian fall. What I

mean by that, it's the season after summer. Guess you might 'a' heard the spression used somewuz, maybe?"

"You mean Indian summer?" I asked him.

"YES, AND NO," he answered. "By that I mean if you ast me I'd haf to answer, 'Yes and no.' Seems like I'd heard the spression used somewuz one way and somewuz else another way. That's the way things are, Mr. Massish; you go one place and they'll tell you one thing, then you take and go another place and they'll tell you different. Another thing I was thinkin' 'bout 'fore you come out hee-uh, it was them mosquitoes. Right now they ain't got the gimp they git later on. Had 'em to kind o' settle on me nigh all over this mornin' wherever I'm kind of exposed. They don't take a-holt like what they do when they git gimped up more'n they be now. Right now, they bite but they don't eat. Mrs. Massish tells me she paid high fer this fertilizer; but it looks kind o' dried out to me, like most o' the goodness was gone out of it. Once the goodness gits gone out o' fertilizer, why, the best you can say fer it is it ain't hardly got no goodness left in it. Course that's only the way it looks to me; I don't say it mightn't look different to somebody else. All a man can do is jest spress his own 'pinion. That's the way things are, Mr. Massish; some'll spress one 'pinion, and then you go and take and ast somebody else and they'll spress another— it may be the same or it may be different. You can't tell till you find out. How do you feel 'bout that, Mr. Massish, yourself? You 'gree with me?" By this time he'd got me confused; I wasn't sure what he meant. "Well—" I said; but he didn't seem to hear me and began talking again before I could go on. "It's a good deal like you say," he said. "Some people look at a matter the right way and they take and spress their 'pinions same as I would myself, or maybe the way you would yourself, Mr. Massish, if you was a mind to— or take Mrs. Massish herself and you might say the same thing 'plied to her or to your two daughters. Zebias Flick told me you had two and the woman in the kitchen, I ast her and she says they was two, so I guess Zebias must 'a' had the rights o' the matter." Mr. Sweetmus had been leaning upon the handle of a hoe as he talked; but now he appeared to become reflective and rubbed the rounded end of the hoe handle up and down against his nose as if to polish both.

"Well, it's funny," he went on. "It's funny but childern always kind o' take to me. Animals and childern and women. Take to me soon as ever they lay eyes on me, and always did. Must be somethin' 'bout me they like. Funny, but that's the way it always is. B'en that way long as I can 'member; even when I b'en among strangers they'll leave other people and come around me— animals and childern and women. Funny, but that's the way it's always b'en."

He scratched his head, leaned again on the handle of the hoe and went back to a previous topic. "Yessuh, breeze sou'west but good, nice weather and it may be too early to say so but looks like two-three months from now we might git a nice, good Indian fall, though, 's I says, some might p'fer to use some other spression in speakin' o' that time o' the year. It's like you said, Mr. Massish; you go one place and people'll spress one 'pinion and then you take and go some other place and they'll tell you different. Yet on the other hand you can take and look af it this way: if you stayed in the same place all the time it might be jest the same way, some spressin' one 'pinion and some tellin' you different; and yet how could you tell unless you set about to find out? You 'gree with me,. Mr. Massish?"

This time I said, "Yes," quickly, and added right away that I had an appointment and would have to be moving on. It seemed to me that his thoughts went around in a circle, as you might say; but they confused me and I found myself unable to be clear as to their drift.

I had the same experience the next morning when I happened to be in his part of the yard again; he stopped work and began to talk before I was within fifty feet of him, and didn't quit until I went into the house. Listening to him gave me a peculiar sensation; he seemed to mean something by what he said, but most of the time I couldn't tell what it was.

One morning while I was shaving I heard Zebias Flick talking with him, down in the yard below.

"Guess you've took note of it yourself, Zebias," Mr. Sweetmus was saying. "I mean how animals and childern and women always like to make over me. Take these two daughters o' Mrs. Massish, and Mr. Massish, too. You see them two talkin' to me yestiddy aftanoon? Guess you did. Know what they was sayin' to me? Well, I'll tell you: said right out they'd b'en thinkin' 'bout my 'pearance. I told 'em that jest seein' me in my gaddnin' clo'es, they couldn't tell so much; but some Sunday I'd walk up this way in the golf suit Mr. Worthington's wife didn't like him in so she give it to me, and they could jedge fer theirselves. So they says no they liked to look out o' the windew sometimes, and sometimes when they was out on the premises they liked to look down towards the gaddin,.maybe, and they'd 'joy theirselves better if I was fixed up all the time. Says they'd like to see me in good, nice overalls, the kind that fasten up over the shoulders. Come right out with it and said they thought I'd look nice in long blue overalls. See? Funny, but that's the way it's always b'en."

"They ain't the only ones," I heard Zebias Flick telling him. "Yestiddy I see three-four fine, handsome womenfolks— summer boa'ders at the hotel, they was, topnotch high-heelers— and they was lookin' over the hedge at you while you was at work; but you never took note of 'em. Ast me who in the world you

was, and I told 'em. they says. 'My!' they kep' sayin'. 'My!' Heard 'em say it two-three times. 'My!'"

"Did they so? Well, it's funny," Mr. Sweetmus told him.

"That wun't all," Zebias went on. "Heard 'em sayin' they wondered where you c'd 'a' come from. Heard 'em say it right out. Same as sayin' they'd 'a' liked to know where you lived so they c'd make your 'quaintance. I never told 'em, though; thought I'd said enough."

"Well, they wouldn't 'a' b'en no harm in your tellin' 'em," I heard Mr. Sweetmus say. "Guess they'll be by again, though, likely. Funny how it keeps on always bein' the same way. Why do you think it is, Zebias?"

"Must be somethin' 'bout you," Zebias told him. "Somethin' that 'tracts 'em."

"MUST be," Mr. Sweetmus agreed, and there was a short silence as if he were doing some hard thinking. "One reason that might help to 'count fer it," he said, after that, "why, it's likely because I never put on no airs with 'em. Always easy and natural-like. They might be other reasons; but that's one of 'em anyways. Naturalness always come natural to me, as you might want to put it. In other words, I'm always jest myself with 'em, same as I am anywuz else. You take note o' me, Zebias, when I'm with animals or childern or women and you'll see I'm behavin' jest as natural 's if I was speakin' man to man. Yessuh, that's part o' the reason they like to make over me the way they do. 'Counts fer part of it, anyways."

Mr. Sweetmus was certainly right about his being natural with animals at any rate, as we discovered an evening or two later. We were just finishing dinner, and for a time I thought a skunk must have got into the very room with us. I never before had such a powerful experience with that odor, and it drove us out of the room in a hurry; but conditions weren't any better in any other part of the house, upstairs or down.

Everybody had to get outdoors and stay there for quite a while, and it was difficult inside the house even after bed-time; I never did know a smell to be so thoroughly distributed throughout a building. Well, the next morning I went out to see how the garden was getting on, and of course Mr. Sweetmus stopped work as soon as he saw me and began to walk toward me, talking about which direction the breeze was coming from, and so on; but as he got nearer I began taking steps backward, so he stopped.

"Guess I still smell of it. Some people don't stummick it so well," he said, and—" smiled pityingly and superiorly. "Take me, fer instance, and I ain't never b'en troubled by it because I've got kind of a natural way with me, and what's natural with animals and childern and women don't never trouble me none,

and you take that little animal and nothin' ain't more natural than fer it to make anythin' that distu'bs it p'take o' that smell. Course I know, though, that summer families in p'tic'lar don't stummick it easy, and that's what I was thinkin' *'bout last night when I see one a-settin' hee-uh in your ya'd. I says to myself, 'Mrs. Massish and Mr. Massish, too, and their two daughters, besides,' I says to myself, 'they wouldn't like this,' I says to—"

I interrupted him. "You did! It was you?"

"Jest like I'm tellin' you, Mr. Massish. Zebias laid off yestiddy aftanoon and Mrs. Massish showed me a cellar window that she says was the new fresh-air intake the carpenters had finished to carry nice, good outside air all through the house. Told me to close that window jest before I went home, because it looked like the evenin' was goin' to git chilly; but I fergot all 'bout it until I was home finishin' supper. So I come all the way back to 'tend to it, and when I got here it was nice, bright moonlight and they was a young skunk a-settin' right there on the grass not two feet in front o' that fresh-air intake. They're friendly little animals if you're natural with 'em— I've had one to follow me as much as a quarter of a mile after dark, walking 'longside o' me, nice and petlike— and they wun't do nothin' or even budge if you 'proach 'em right, in a natural kind of a way. Course I knowed you wouldn't want one pra'tic'ly in your fresh-air intake, so when I come up to him I give him kind of a kick—"

"You did!" I said. "You did!"

" 'Sploded right in my face a'most," Mr. Sweetmus informed me. "Never did git it stronger. Awdinarily, 's I says, I ain't sensitive to it; but kickin' him like I done it come on me kind o' like a knife in the nostrils— more'n I'd looked fer, you might say. Disagreeable. By the time I'd got back home, though, course it wun't anythin' a man with a good deal o' naturalness would object to. He went on 'bout his bizness after I give him that kick; didn't hurt him none. Course I shet that window 'cause she'd told me to; but if it had b'en mine I wouldn't 'a' done it, 'cause after what'd happened 'twould 'a' b'en better to let the house air out some. Bein's it was her window and not mine, and she knowed what she wanted, I didn't see no option but to take and shet it. Looks to me jest the same way as 'tis 'bout that gaddin. I got a love o' flowers jest the same 's I got a love of animals and childern and women; but the way I like flowers is to see 'em growin' naturallike— wild flowers you hear some people callin' 'em. You've heard that spression used yourself, Mr. Massish, I guess; but my own 'pinion is that it ain't no matter whether you call 'em wild flowers or jest natural flowers, or whatever you might take a mind to say 'bout 'em, the point is they're handsome to look at and no trouble to anybody: What I mean by that, they. ain't no trouble if you let 'em alone and 'don't take no trouble 'bout 'eun.

Course it's her gaddin, though, and she knows what she wants; but if it 'twas mine—"

I EXCUSED myself here and got away, though of course he kept on talking as long as I was in sight. It began to look like an-uncomfortable summer for me: I had to keep out of the yard entirely during Mr. Sweetmus' working hours or there wouldn't be any garden; inside the house there was such a hammering and sawing and ripping and tearing going on that I couldn't read, much less think; I don't care to spend my whole time motoring and I gave up trying to play golf a long time ago: because I'm just one of those natural-born disgraces at the game.

Well, you see, I had to do something with my time and that's how it happened that I bought the motor boat. I'd been out in other people's boats enough to understand that I don't get seasick in a boat so long as it keeps going ahead; qualms begin to come over me. only when it stops and goes to flopping about in one location, and when that can be avoided I enjoy motor boating first rate. So one day I was down on a wharf at the harborside and saw a fine-looking boat, all nicely painted and varnished, with the brass work polished and about thirty-eight feet long, I judged.

It had a nice mahogany cabin forward, a small bridge deck with comfortable seats for the operator and one other person; there was an ample cockpit with four or five wicker chairs in it, and there was a little rowboat or dinghy swung up on davits—altogether a goodappearing motor boat. So I asked a man standing there whose boat it was.

He was a pleasant-looking man, middle-aged, in a blue suit and blue yachting cap, and I was surprised when he answered, "It might as well be yours, Mr. Massey, because it's for sale at a bargain and a good boat, too."

Then I remembered having seen him before and that his name was Cap'n Turner, so we had a conversation about the matter and he told me the boat belonged to a summer family he'd run it for the year before; but they'd gone to Europe and left him the job of selling it and getting himself the position of captain on it again, if he could. Well, the long and short of it is, I bought that boat the next day, with Cap'n Turner to run it for me, and of course Mrs. Massey and Enid and Clarissa got right excited.

The way they talked about it and the plans they made, you wouldn't have thought I was going to have much to do with the *Wanda*—that was the boat's name— she was just going to be used for them to give parties on. Mrs. Massey's enthusiasm was the quickest to drop; she isn't a good sailor, and her first excursion on the *Wanda* was a poor experience for her. The girls'

excitement tapered off quickly, too, and within a week if I asked them to go out with me they usually looked absent-minded and began to make excuses.

Of course I enjoyed having people along with me; but I got to liking the *Wanda* just as well when they weren't. She had a good engine in her that Cap'n Turner kept in fine condition, so my stomach didn't become unsettled by our having to stop for repairs, and I learned how to manage the wheel and the controls myself; I got a good deal of pleasure out of running the boat.

We'd usually go out to sea soon after luncheon and not come back into the harbor until along about five o'clock, and one afternoon we got back later than usual and were just tying up when I noticed Mr. Sweetmus standing on the wharf that we used, looking down at us with his customary affable expression.

"SEE you b'en moty boatin', Mr. Massish," he said. "Jest on my way home and thought I might 's well stop to find out how you 'joy yoursef. Ain't never b'en on the ocean myself nor into it, neither. B'en to the bathin' beach, though, couple times when I was younger to look at other people goin' into it. Overdo it, they do— leastways that's my 'pinion. Gittin' the whole human body into water, it ain't natural 'cept fer them fishes. Disagreeable."

"You don't mean to say you can't swim?" I asked him.

"Me?" He looked surprised. "Never see no use of it. Ain't never b'en in a boat, neither, 'cept two-three times in my life. Nice-lookin' chairs you got there, though. Wouldn't mind settin' in one myself some Sunday aftanoon when you're goin' out, if so be you'd be willin' I sh'd 'company you. Ain't got nothin' p'tic'lar to do next Sunday aftanoon, if so be you'd be pleased to have me."

Of course there wasn't anything to do but tell him he could come, though I certainly didn't enjoy the prospect, because I knew he'd talk the whole time and the more I had of his conversation the more confusing I found it. Also, I mean to say that his whole character perplexed me; he was the only man I ever saw who would walk up to a skunk and kick it, and the fact that he would kick one right in front of a person's fresh-air intake, and then casually tell the person about it, without the slightest appearance of realizing he'd done anything remarkable or what the person would be thinking of him— well, I'm not much of a psychologist, I suppose, and Ananias Prinsh Sweetmus was too much for me!

When I got home that afternoon, after telling him he could go out on the Wanda with me the following Sunday, I found one of my family had other boating plans for the same date, and I thought it better not to mention my engagement with Mr. Sweetmus. It was Clarissa who had the plans.

She's a nice, bright, sensible girl, always with plenty of boys seeming interested in her, and now and then she appears to get excited about one or another of 'em. This time it was a boy named Paul Bicksit whom the rest of the family hadn't ever seen; but she'd met him at a college dance somewhere and had talked about him in a conscious way, so I judged she was more upset over him than she usually got. He'd called her on long distance, I gathered, and was going to spend Sunday at Mary's Neck; so she'd decided she wanted the *Wanda* for the afternoon.

"Why, certainly," I told her. "Bring him along."

"Oh," she said, and looked serious. "I only thought that probably you'd be having something else to do that afternoon and wouldn't want the boat."

I didn't take the hint because Sunday's likely to be a dull day at Mary's Neck, usually, and it had already occurred to me that I wouldn't mind having Mr. Sweetmus along so much if Clarissa and her young friend were there for him to converse with. Probably it was inconsiderate of me— maybe you might call it selfish— but anyhow I just said that I'd be on the bridge with Cap'n Turner, running the boat, and there was plenty of room in the cockpit, so she let it go at that. You could see it wasn't exactly what she wanted; but she decided to make it do.

Young Bicksit turned up in a dusty automobile Sunday morning right after breakfast, a tall, nice-looking boy not different from others so far as I could see, though Clarissa was all tensed up with self-consciousness and acting as if the rest of us didn't belong to her. The two of them had the whole morning together, driving in his car, so I didn't feel selfish any more about their having a companion for the afternoon's excursion on the *Wanda*.

When we got down to the wharf Mr. Sweetmus was there waiting for us and Clarissa gave a start at the sight of him. "What on earth's he doing here?" she whispered to me. "For heaven's sake, don't say anything that would give Paul the idea he's our gardener!"

She was nervous; but I could see, in a way, why she didn't want the young man to think Mr. Sweetmus was connected with us in any capacity. He was dressed in the clothes he'd mentioned Mrs. Worthington's having given him because she didn't like her husband in them, and I haven't often seen anything more inappropriate-looking than Mr. Sweetmus with them on. You could see why Mrs. Worthington hadn't wanted her husband even to play golf in 'em, on account of their loudness, and Mr. Sweetmus hadn't helped them any by wearing a little, stiff, last-summer's straw hat that somebody had given him. Clarissa tried to get us off in the boat without appearing to notice him, though of course he'd already begun to talk and she couldn't have had much hope that young Mr. Bicksit wouldn't find out at least that Mr. Sweetmus knew us.

"Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!" she kept saying, pretending to laugh. "I'm simply mad to be out on the sea! Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! I'm simply mad for a breath of salt air!" She kept right on talking as loudly as she could, trying to drown out what Mr. Sweetmus was saying.

THE three of us were in the boat by this time and Cap'n Turner, anxious to please Clarissa, was casting off the lines that held us to the wharf. "Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!" Clarissa said. "I'm simply—" But Mr. Sweetmus, talking all the time, had already come down the steps from the wharf and landed himself with us in the cockpit. "Nice, good, pleasant weather," he said. "Nice, good day fer a sail, though course that's only my 'pinion. Some people might say it was a nice, good aftanoon to take a walk in, maybe, on count o' their not havin' the stummick they might be called: on fer if they went sailin'. They might have their 'pinions jest the same as I and you and the rest of us got ours."

Clarissa looked horrified. "Get him off the boat!" she whispered to me sharply. "Do something! Quick!"

I thought it better just to make a gesture that showed her I couldn't do anything, because we were already passing out of the harbor and getting into the ocean chop by then. It seemed to me just as well that she should surmise Mr. Sweetmus had invited himself along, which of course was really the case, so I made the gesture I speak of, and as Clarissa looked as if she were going to faint, I hurriedly introduced Mr. Sweetmus to Mr. Bicksit and went up on the bridge and took the wheel from Cap'n Turner, sitting with my back to the cockpit. I didn't look round for quite a while; but I could hear Mr. Sweetmus talking and I wondered whether or not Mr. Bicksit was taking him for a friend of the family, gardening not having been referred to.

"Always take to me, Mr. Biskit," I heard him saying. "Animals and childern and women. Funny, too; but some think it's 'count o' naturalness. Seems to be part of it, anyways. You take hens, fer instance; it's awful seldom you'll see anybody that's got a pet hen, fer the simple reason why, it ain't natural fer a hen to take to it. But I had a hen once—"

Clarissa had come up on the bridge and bent over me. "Get him out of the cockpit!" she said. "Get him out!"

"Me?" I asked her. "I'm running the boat, Clarissa."

"Get him out!" she said. "Can't you hear him calling Paul 'Biskit'? Get him out!"

"But I—"

"Make him come up here with you!" she said fiercely. "Make him!"

"I can't. There's only room for Cap'n Turner and me up here, and I want the cap'n to stay; I might need him."

Clarissa shocked me. She isn't often sacrilegious; but she said something that maybe could be excused on account of the state she was in. Then she went back to the cockpit and began to try to out-talk Mr. Sweetmus.

After a while I ventured to glance back over my shoulder, as if in a casual manner, and I saw that she was looking pretty red. Just as I happened to look, she and young Mr. Bicksit were placing their chairs so that their backs would be toward Mr. Sweetmus; but he was moving his own to be right alongside of them.

"Better position fer the view, as you might call it," I heard him say. "Kind o' fixes us better towards the breeze, too, as you says, Mr. Briskit. Way I look at the matter, or, in other words, what you might call my 'pinion, as you might want to put it, Mr. Briskit—"

HE WENT right on and I noticed he'd worked round to calling Clarissa's friend "Briskit," by this time, which I supposed wasn't pleasing either of the young people, and, after that, I couldn't hear their voices at all, so it looked as if they'd given up.

I heard Mr. Sweetmus talking extensively about seasickness and his opinion ef it, and probably his two listeners hoped he'd be attacked; but he wasn't. lt was too nice a day for that, with only a light chop on the surface of the ocean, and I found myself enjoying the run much as usual—selfishly, I suppose, because of course I couldn't get entirely away from a slight consciousness of an ermotional disturbance going on behind me inside of two youthful temperaments, especially Clarissa's.

Our part of the coast runs east and west, roughly speaking, with rocks and reefs and shoals scattered around mighty liberally; but I'd already learned where most of them are, the day was bright and I had Cap'n Turner close by in case I needed advice— on the whole I was feeling pretty chipper. I ran along the coast to westward, keeping a mile or so out, for about an hour, I judged; then I noticed Cap'n Turner was looking over his shoulder pretty often and I thought he must have got interested in Mr. Sweetmus' conversation.

"Quite a talker, isn't he?" I said.

" 'Nias Sweetmus, you mean?" Cap'n Turner asked me. "I wasn't looking at him, Mr. Massey. There's a fog bank off to the eastud. She'll likely hold off unless there's a change of wind; but I was thinking maybe we'd better get the compass out so's to get our bearings before we're closed in, in case the breeze shifts."

Well, I didn't want to get caught out in any fog, so I swung the boat around right then and there and headed for home, though that bank looked a long way off to the east and there didn't seem to be much danger of its coming

down on us. Cap'n Turner kept looking at it thoughtfully, though, and he said, "I believe maybe I better bring that compass up, just to be on the safe side."

It was usually kept in a locker down in the cabin and he went to get it; but he couldn't find it immediately because I'd moved it myself, a few days before, and forgotten about it. It didn't seem to me he was down there more than three or four minutes, and nobody could have believed a fog bank capable of behaving the way this one did in that short time.

When Cap'n Turner left the bridge I'd have sworn that bank was miles to the east, and then, all at once— right away and without my being able to see that it was moving— it didn't look much farther off than what in a city would be just a few blocks. Sections of it, like drifts of smoke, had already begun to go by us, and by the time I remembered where I'd put the compass, and told Cap'n Turner and he came up with it, the solid part of that fog was all over us and you couldn't see a hundred feet in any direction.

Cap'n Turner coughed a few times; then he asked me, "We didn't pass that spindle while I was down in the cabin, did we?"

"Spindle?" I said. "You mean one of those black poles sticking out of the water? Kind of a buoy, you mean?"

"Well, this was a red one," he told me, coughing some more. "We ought to've gone outside of it, keeping it to port."

"To port?" I asked him. "Port. That would be—"

"It would be to your left," he said. "You didn't notice—"

"No, I was looking at the fog. If you think there's any risk of our running into that spindle, cap'n, perhaps we ought to try to put on a little more speed so as to get away from it."

"Well, no," he told me. "I was thinking maybe we'd better slack her up a mite till we can get a better idea of about where we are. You see—"

That's all the further he got with what he was saying, because the underneath part of that boat hit something awful hard just then; the bow dropped down; there was a most terrible banging and scraping and crashing and tearing and bumping, and the wheel quit offering any resistance at all, so I knew that the steering gear was among the various things that had got themselves broken. These doings only lasted about ten seconds; then the engine stopped and we seemed te be flopping around in deepenough water, not bumping any more; but Cap'n Turner seemed disturbed.

"Might 'a' been better for us if we'd hung up on that bunch of rock," he said. "But now she's banged and scraped all the way over it, and Lord knows what's happened to her under water!"

"You mean there might be a bad leak?" I asked him.

"There certainly might!" he said. "We'd better get that dinghy into the water the first thing we do, in case—"

I saw what he meant and it made me uncomfortable, because there were five of 'us on the Wanda; that dinghy. was only a flat-bottomed rowboat nine feet long and couldn't possibly carry more than. three people. If the Wanda had been damaged enough to make her sink, it looked -like hard times ahead for somebody. Back in the cockpit Clarissa was calling to know what had happened and what we were going to do, Mr. Bicksit wasn't saying anything and Mr. Sweetmus was stating that in his opinion we'd hit something which in his opinion was a rock, though others were entitled to their own opinions upon the matter.

Cap'n Turner and I hurried back to the davits, which were at one side of the cockpit, and got the dinghy lowered into the water; then Turner hustled forward again and disappeared down the stairway that led to the cabin and to the engine compartment, which is under the bridge. Almost instantly Mr. Sweetmus rolled himself over the side of the Wanda and plumped down into the stern seat— the best one— in the dinghy.

"What on earth are you doing?" I asked him severely, though the truth is I wanted to do exactly the same thing that he'd done and only controlled the impulse by an effort. "What do you mean? Get back in this boat at once!"

"Why, no, Mr. Massish," he said in a mild voice, and he looked: up at me as though he felt surprised and maybe a little hurt by the severe tone I'd used to him. "Why, no. Course it's only my own 'pinion, Mr. Massish; but, the way I look at it, that there boat you're in got an awful dreadful bump back yonder. Sounded to me like she got all creation busted out of her, and, the way I look at it, the water must be fairly a-pourin' into her on her under side somewuz. Course that's only my own 'pinion and you—"

"Get back into this boat!" I told him. "That dinghy'll only carry three people; there are five of us and we haven't decided which three—"

"IT couldn't hardly do it, Mr. Massish," he said argumentatively. "Way I look at it, that boat you're in is li'ble to take and go right straight to the bottom of the ocean almost any minute. Way I look at it, I'd be awful li'ble to git drowned in that there boat. I wouldn't be on her right now fer a million dolluhs, Mr. Massish. No, suh, you couldn't hire me to be on that boat. Way I look at it—"

He went on talking; but I turned to Clarissa, who was white and trying not to tremble. "Get into the dinghy," I told her. "Get in there quick!"

"No," she said, and her voice wasn't steady. "I won't unless Paul—"

But young Mr, Bicksit interrupted her, and I certainly admired him for what he said and the way he behaved. "Don't be absurd," he told her. "Do what your father says and get into the dinghy immediately. You and your father both. Make her get in, Mr. Massey, and go with her yourself. It's the only thing to do."

That young man looked heroic to me as he said this, and handsome, too. It seemed to me I'd never seen a betterlooking young man— or one with better ideas, either!

Of course when he spoke of me I said, "No, no," in a protesting manner, though I didn't want to sound too firm and kind of hoped that this fine young man would go-ahead and argue me into doing what he said; but Clarissa was agitated and didn't seem to get his point Clearly. It made me nervous, too, the way Cap'n Turner and I didn't seem to have much place in her consciousness just then. She stamped her foot. "I won't move one-step!" she said, addressing Mr. Bicksit exclusively. "Never! Not unless you come. with me! I refuse unless you—"

"Never!" he said, speaking the word even louder than she did; and he took off his coat, showing that he meant to put up a man's struggle before he went down. "You and your father get into that. boat and don't talk any more about it!"

CLARISSA began to cry. "This is a nice way to treat me!" she sobbed. "After telling me this morning that you cared about me, do you think I'd ever believe you if you're going to act like this?"

It was curious, but her voice sounded really angry with him, and it. seemed to me she was crying more because she was furious over the way he was behaving than because of anything else.

"A nice life you offer a woman, isn't it?" she went on. "I'd never know when you were going to do something crazy! Do you think you could swim to shore? It's more than a mile! In this fog how would you even know what direction to swim in? If you don't get into that boat this second I'll never—"

Young Bicksit stepped toward her as if he meant o pick her up and put her into the dinghy. "You do as I say!" he told her. "Get into that boat!"

"I won't! Never! Never! Never!"

"You will."

"Never!"

"Hee-uh!" Mr. Sweetmus interrupted. "Listen hee-uh!" He was holding to the side of the *Wanda* with one hand and looked uncomfortable because of the way his weight in the stern made the bow of the dinghy stick up out of the water. "Course it's only my own 'pinion, but seems like that boat you're in is

saggin' down some to one side. I don't know nothin' 'bout rowin' and they'll have to be somebody in this little boat hee-uh to row it. Way I look at it, whoever gits in hee-uh with me ought to know somethin' 'bout rowin'. Course it's only my own 'pinion, but the way that boat you're in 'pears to be saggin' down to one side looks like you better git the matter settled 'mong yourselves one way or 'nother 'fore very long. Better git it settled; better git it settled."

Well, there's no denying that what he said and the way he said it made me teel irritated with him. Clarissa and her friend didn't pay any attention to him, being in an emotional state about saving each other and going on with their argument loudly; but I spoke to Mr. Sweetmus with a good deal of indignation. Matters didn't look right to me; he was a bachelor, and both Cap'n Turner and I had families to support—or at least, in my own case, investments had to be looked after and protected— and Mrs. Massey's garden wasn't so terribly important.

"Look here!" I said to Mr. Sweetmus. "You get out of that boat! You climb back here and wait till we decide which three of the five of us—"

"Why, no, Mr. Massish." He looked at me reproachfully. "Way I look at it, I wouldn't care to take the resk. That there boat o' yours—"

But just then there was a startling, strange loud sound from inside the boat, as if it was giving a terrible, tinny scream. I jumped, Clarissa shrieked, Mr. Bicksit got paler than he had been, and Mr. Sweetmus gave a flop in the dinghy and put his other hand on his stomach. But the noise was only Cap'n Turner coming up the stairway and blowing a tin foghorn he'd got out of a locker; it certainly gave-all of us a turn.

"My Orry!" Mr. Sweetmus called complainingly to Cap'n Turner. "Ain't things bad enough, you got to make a noise like that without givin' a man no warnin'?"

Cap'n Turner had brought a brass bell with him, and now he began to ring it while he was blowing the horn.

"What chance have we got?' I asked him. "How long do you think there's any hope this boat will—"

"Looks fairly bad," he said, letting up on the horn. "Strut's gone, keel's splintered, I think, shaft's busted and she's taking in a good deal of water. If somebody doesn't come along pretty soon and give us a tow, I guess we'll have to get out the rubber boat for you and me. I didn't want to do it because it's quite a job to inflate her with the pump we got; but—"

"What rubber boat?" I asked him. "You mean to say we've got another boat on board?"

"Yes. It came with the *Wanda*; it's under that after hatch. If we had to, you and I could use it and let the others take the dinghy; but—" He broke off,

stopped ringing the bell and peered through the fog. "Guess we won't have to, because we're going to get a tow." I couldn't see anything; but he yelled: "That you, Ben?"

Then there was a hoarse voice out somewhere to the right of us. "Lookin' fer a tow, George?"

"Guess you better!" Cap'n Turner shouted, and a lumbering, gray old fishing boat with a two-cylinder motor chugging away in it and three men in oilskins came out of that thick smokiness and began to maneuver alongside. Cap'n Turner passed them a towline; they went ahead, and when the line tightened, the *Wanda* gave a soggy lurch and began to follow, upon which there was a loud complaint from behind, alongside the cockpit.

"Hee-uh!" Mr. Sweetmus called. "Ain't you got no sense! Git me out o' this little boat! Expeck me to drag my arm out of its slockit, holdin' on!"

For my part I didn't care much what happened to him, because i+ seemed to me that if I'd ever seen any human being make an exhibition of himself he'd been the one. He didn't know we had a rubber boat on board any more than I did, which was a fact that made his disgrace apparent to everybody; but you never saw a more complacent expression than his after young Bicksit and Cap'n Turner hauled him aboard and he settled down in one of the comfortable chairs,

"Nicer place to set than that there hard board in the rowboat," he said. "Long as they ain't no more danger, why, the cushion in this chair is pleasanter to set on, though course that's only my own 'pinion."

We hoisted the dinghy back upon its davits; Cap'n Turner went below to see what he could do about the leak and a temporary repair of the steering gear so as to help with the towing, and we began to get ourselves settled down again and less emotional. As a matter of fact, though, this remark of mine about getting less emotional mightn't properly apply to Clarissa; she seemed to want it known that she was indignant and had got her feelings hurt.

Tears kept coming to her eyes, and she wouldn't speak to young Bicksit at all. If he came to her end of the cockpit she'd gq to the other, and if he came there she'd go up on the bridge and turn her back to him.

Mr. Sweetmus kept talking to both of them, and sometimes she'd answer him right politely to make it more pointed that she wasn't speaking to her young friend. Mr. Sweetmus put his own interpretation upon this conduct of hers and I heard him explaining it to Mr. Bicksit, though the latter didn't seem to take much interest, and very likely agreed mentally with me that Mr. Sweetmus' tone was insufferable.

"Animals and childern and women," he said. "Funny, but that's always b'en the way; they'll leave other people anywuz I go and come around me."

I heard him explaining this same thing to Zebias Flick the next morning.

"As you says, Zebias, must be somethin' 'bout me that 'tracts 'em," he was saying. "Naturalness, that's part of it. Always jest myself with 'em. When that accident come about, I was jest myself, same 's I always be. All the way back to the habbuh you could see how it 'tracted her. Liked me better'n she did him, 'count of it. Naturalness, that's part o' the reason fer it— anyways, that's a part of it, Zebias."

4: The Deaf Mute

H. de Vere Stacpoole

1863-1951

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HAVE you ever had any doings Beira way? Well, if you'd had you'd have wished you hadn't. I don't know what the Portuguese are like at home. I've heard it said they are good enough. But if that is so they don't bear exporting. Beira has picked up a bit, I hear, but when I knew it it was all galvanized iron and sand, jiggers and drink, to say nothing of evil citizens. There were so many laws you couldn't help breaking them and when you broke them you got fined or blackmailed which was pretty much the same thing.

That's how the folk lived, taking in each other's sins and charging for washing them. It was all the washing they did.

I struck Beira after a two years' slant of ill luck. Ud made a tidy bit in Sydney over a wool speculation and then I started in on the copra business at Portuguese Timor and dropped nearly everything Pd made. Then I collided with a chap by name of Mason and we clapped all we had into a pearling venture and lost our boat off Sandalwood Island, ripped the bottom out of her on a reef and got from there to Flores in a fishing canoe we borrowed from an unfriendly native, giving him a rap on the head by way of IOU— he'd tried to club Mason. We circumnavigated Flores and got into the Flores Sea, went from island to island fishing and fruiting and brought that canoe right to Macassar.

Wed had enough adventures to make a story book and we'd have started on the lecture jag only:we couldn't talk Dutch, so-we sold that canoe for ten dollars and got drunk. I'm telling you. After that I shipped on a Dutchman before the mast and the end of all that gay adventure was Beira harbor where I skipped with twelve dollars in my pocket.

I didn't part with that twelve dollars.

They are always dredging at Beira and I got work on a dredger and a bunk at a shanty the railway men used. There was a fellow on the same job with me, "Shan" McCoy, a Yankee— at least he'd started life as a Yankee but was pretty much of a cosmopolitan by the time I met him; a six-footer, thin as a rake and without a tongue to him. The silentest, broodingest guy. Couldn't make head or tail of him; seemed to have something on his mind that he couldn't prize off till I used to think sometimes he'd maybe done a murder and had the corpse on his chest. It wasn't that. He had something on his mind but that wasn't what made him close with his tongue. He was just one of the shut-head sort.

There are sharks at Beira, thick enough to be dredged up almost, and one day Shan slipped his foot and went overside and a big gray nurse would have

had him, sure, only I harpooned her with a crowbar and gave him time to clutch a rope.

He shook my fist and that night up at the shanty he got me aside and began to speak. He'd come out to Beira on a hunting job with a man by name of Lewers. Taking the railway to Salisbury they got into British territory and struck north in the direction of the Zambezi. They had good hunting but he wasn't bothering about that. Shan's game was diamonds. On the way back to Salisbury they camped one night. Lewers had a touch of fever and they stuck at the camping place all next day and Shan having nothing to do went prospecting round with a shotgun after birds.

He struck a patch of blue clay. He knew all about diamonds and he scratched round and presently he lit on one. It wasn't bigger than half the size of a hazel nut and it wasn't high grade— being yellow, about the color of sugar candy— but it was good. enough for Shan. He spent the day hunting and got half a fistful and knew his fortune was made. He concluded to say nothing. Shan was no fool and he knew the ropes and what he'd have to deal with in a diamond proposition. You don't dig diamonds like potatees. To work that mine would mean carting machinery all the way from Salisbury and labor and what not. Twenty thousand pounds wouldn't but just begin the business and Shan hadn't twenty dollars.

His game was to go to De Beers, show his specimens and sell right out. De Beers having bought the land and established their mining rights would close the thing down and leave it for maybe fifty years with a chap with a gun sitting on it. De Beers don't want diamonds, they want the price diamonds will fetch and they don't want their market watered. It's not only themselves— all the diamond diggers are in a ring and if a mine was struck in Piccadilly Circus they are rich enough to buy up London so's to close on it.

Shan reckoned to ask forty thousand pounds for his mine and to get it. Spot cash.

He was paid off by Lewers at Beira and he was so full of his luck he went on a jag that was the king of all jags and when he'd done beating Portuguese policemen he started chasing black men round the harbor— and he had an idea that he was pelting them with diamonds. Anyhow, when he woke up next morning in jug his pockets were as empty as his stomach. They gave him a month shoveling dirt from the lagoon at the back of the town and when he was free he got the job on the dredger.

Well, seeing I'd saved him from the shark he guessed I was his lucky man and he offered to take me as partner on a cruise back to the mine to collect some more specimens; said it was no use tapping De Beers without specimens to show, as every ballyhooly from Tanganyika to the Breakwater was always

calling in on them with mines to sell; said we'd want three thousand dollars for the expedition and to get us to Kimberley after. He'd figured it all out but he hadn't figured how to get the dollars.

Between us, with saved pay and what not, we couldn't scrape more than two hundred. We reckoned we'd be ten years saving what we wanted so I took the lot and went to Shapira's gambling joint and broke the bank. Took close on three thousand two hundred dollars and then we went to the bar and had two bottles of tonic water and two wheelongs.

Shap didn't mind. Liked it. For the news of our winnings went round and the whole of Beira was busting itself for a month after, trying to break that bank again. But Shan played Shap a nasty trick, I must say, for he nailed his deaf mute.

This chap was an American negro six foot and deaf and dumb. He was Shapira's handy man, chucker out and stand-by, for he was no use as evidence in stabbing cases which were frequent.

Shap would say he didn't see who did the knifing and the black couldn't talk, so every one was happy and it would be brought in "done by some party unknown" or maybe "suicide." Mosenthall's gambling shop had two hangings attached to it, or garrotings— for they used to garrote at Beira— but Shap's show was clear of all that and parties felt safe and sure that if they were a bit free with their knives there'd be not much bother in the morning.

We wanted a man to take along to help carry the provisions and truck and we wanted a man who wouldn't talk and here was the guy ready made, so to speak. Shan did the seducing with two hundred dollars and sign language and the chap gave Shapira the shove and joined in with us; and I will say for Shapira he took it like a gentleman. For if hed been otherwise disposed he might have had us done in by a couple of his clients.

It never struck either of us that Shap might wonder why we were so keen on having a man who couldn't talk. There's things you don't think of, at the moment, that you think of afterward. It was just as well anyhow, else we might have been lying awake at nights listening for Shap on our heels and there's no use in meeting troubles halfway.

But we were fools enough to try and cover our traces by saying we were on the hunting job. Shan was known to have been a- hunter, so we thought that lie would stick; maybe it did, but it's all the same truth that talking seldom does good and we'd handed that lie round and it maybe got to Shapira before we nailed his black. There's cogs within wheels.

Pongo was the name the black went by, without any offense, seeing he couldn't hear.

ii

WE TOOK the train to Salisbury one morning bright and early and as we jogged along we had lots of time to think of the work before us. It was no picnic. Properly speaking going into that country we ought to have had a dozen chaps with us for porters to carry grub and guns. It was no place for wheel traffic or we might have taken an ox wagon or a Cape cart or something; but as it stood we had to make out with our own shoulders and Pongo.

We'd left the provisioning and all that till we reached Salisbury; and all the way there, having nothing better to do, we kept figuring out the weights and measurements of the stuff we had to take. Bully beef weighs heavy but biscuit means bulk. That was the fact that underlay everything. Then there was the question of armaments; we weren't going big-game hunting but there was always the chance of being hunted by big game; besides, we reckoned to live mostly by the gun. On top of everything we'd got to take a spade.

We found a Hebrew in Salisbury, a chap that ran a sort of general store and was known to Shan, and giving him the whole order we were outfitted and ready for the push inside of two days. We took with us, besides the grub, two Colt automatics, a double .500 express rifle shooting six drams of powder and an old twelve-bore Grant double-barreled shotgun.

Shan and me, what between blanket, gun, water bottle and ammunition, had a load of twenty-five pounds apiece; on top of that we had twenty-five pounds of grub to carry. Fifty pounds in all. Pongo had eighty pounds of grub to tote and the spade on top of that and he wasn't overloaded, though the ordinary native porter kicks at anything over seventy pounds.

Then one morning before the stars were out Shan gave us the order to hike and we hiked.

I reckon before that day's march was through I was cursing diamonds. The black didn't turn a hair and Shan was all right, but I was néw to the business. However, I kept my head shut and pretended to like it. I had to keep on pretending that night when we camped, for we had no tent. Shan made a lean-to of bush and grass and mimosa sticks to keep the dew off, but it was mortal cold when the stars came out. However, I tried to keep thinking of all the fine times we would have when we'd hived that mine, if I wasn't crippled with rheumatism first; and between that and listening to Pongo's teeth chattering I fell asleep.

Next morning we began to know where we were, for we hadn't been marching an hour when I near tumbled over a rhino asleep in the grass and he stumbled on to his feet and Shan downed him with the express before he could do more than squeal. Shan cut lumps out of him that he said was good to

eat and we had them for dinner and supper that night and breakfast next morning and dinner next day, till I began to understand what it means when chaps talk about liying on their guns. You can't, without getting indigestion— that's to say if you are pressed for time and have to keep moving, for hunting takes time and it's not every day you come across game right in your path. We hadn't time for hunting so we had to take along as much of the rhino meat as we could carry and live on it as long as we could. Two days after, Shan got a water buck. We'd camped by a big pool that ran west for miles with the blaze of sunset on it and we were lying down in the long grass, dead beat and resting before cutting stuff for a lean-to, when a herd of buck came down to drink right opposite, more than two hundred yards away.

The wind was blowing from them so they hadn't our scent and Shan dropped one. The meat, as much as we could carry of it, lasted us only another two days, for a chap can eat eight pounds a day if he lives on meat alone. And so it went on, luck always sending us something easy to get just as we were going to bite into our bully beef.

Ten days out we struck into the country where Shan had located the mine, the bleakest bit of land, more like the veldt down round the Vaal than anywhere else, with nothing moving on it but a hawk's shadow now and then chasing the wind.

Shan pointed out to away on the sky line where a whole line of little hills like kopjes stood out, each cut like a carving on the sky. "That's the place," said he; "we're in sight of it— right there it lies only half a day's march away."

It was more words than he had spoken for the last two days. He and the deaf-and-dumb black were a match pair in conversation and I tell you I was more than fed up, with marching with them mutes. But the sight of those kopjes and the smell of diamonds that seemed to come from them made me forget everything but the want to whoop. It was ten o'clock in the morning when we sighted them and getting along for three when we struck them and they were a funny lot of little hills close to, looked as if they'd been made for fun and forgotten by the Almighty— hundreds of them covering the scenery so's you couldn't get a clear view north, south, east or west when you were among them.

Shan was ahead, leading the way. He had a compass but he never bothered much with it for he had the sense of direction in his head same as an animal. He was ahead as I was saying when all of a sudden he stopped as dead as a telegraph pole and shot out one hand behind him. We stopped right there. Then we saw him down on his hands and knees going like a land crab and missed sight of him as he turned one of the kopjes.

A few minutes after he was back again.

"What's up?" I says.

"Were done," said Shan. "There's two blighters there on the job. Were dished."

"Hell!" said I.

We sat down with our backs to a kopje; the black took off a bit and sat down likewise. Then we listened to the wind. The wind in that place makes a noise like what a woman makes when she's rocking a baby and singing to it; it's the little hills maybe and the number of them, but I'd sooner listen to that hush-a-bye, hum-hum noise with the sun shining and nothing moving in the sky and a thousand square miles of silence all round.

"Well?" says I.

"Well?" says Shan.

"What's your move?" says I.

"I'm thinking," says he.

We listened to the wind some more. Then Shan suddenly get his hind legs under him.

"Come on," he says, "we've got to meet them and do a palaver— chase them off if we can, make terms if we can't."

"Right," says I.

He led off, I followed and the black came behind.

When we opened the ground there were the chaps. There was not much sign of digging. They'd knocked off work and were lying in the sun and all their camp was the ashes of a fire, a couple of bundles and a lump of deer meat to judge by the pelt it was wrapped in; a gun lay by the meat.

One of the chaps was a mighty big, red-bearded man; the other was a dark rat of a chap. They were in their shirts and near each of the two lay a belt with a big navy revolver; at least I judged that was their armaments by the size of the holsters, and I was right. Down and out scalawags they looked and when they sighted us they made a grab for their guns and before we could draw our automatics they had covered us.

"Hands up," cries the big man. We upped. All but Pongo who sat clean dewn on the ground at the sight of the firing party that was making ready to shoot. Then they came up close, guns leveled all the time, and without a word out of them they took our automatics.

"Where's your camp and gear?" asked the big man and they were the first words he spoke.

"Back there," says Shan pointing with his thumb over his shoulder.

"Any more men with you?" asks the other.

"Nope," says Shan.

"Bill," says the big blighter; "kick that black on his feet." Bill does. "Now right about march," says Red Beard, "and lead on to your camp." We tramped, with them behind us, and when we got to the kepje where our goods were lying we halted. They took stock of the stuff and then the big chap begins questioning us, Shan answering up and trying to lie, saying we belonged to a hunting party and we'd got lost. Making such a rotten show of a story I could have kicked him as he stood there.

"Well," says the big man when hed finished, and looking at the spade Shan had forgot, "you got lost did you— hunting big game? Was you digging for them?"

Shan says nothing.

Then says the other, "You kin go and tell that yarn to the chaps in Salisbury when you get back. An' I've only to say this; if I find you there when I get back I'll tell my yarn, which is that you and your two mates came crawlin' on us with automatics an' if we hadn't covered you and stripped you of your weapons you'd have had us. Now then, shoulder your grub and hike."

"And our guns?" said Shan.

"Lord, we don't trust you with no guns," says the other. "Do we, Heffernan?"

"No, be gob," says the other, "we don't."

"But see here," says Shan, "we'll be lost without that rifle. Our grub won't hold out and s'pose we meet up with hyenas? Lord, this is murder!"

"Come on, Heff," says the big chap, "and good day to you," says he to us. Then they turned on their heels and walked off back among the kopjes, leaving us there. Scuppered. You see how it was. They had us every way. It was a hundred to one we never got back to Salisbury without guns, ammunition or food enough. If we did we had nothing to show in the way of diamonds to make any man believe our story. And s'posing we did get some lunatic to back us these two scalawags would swear we tried to jump their claim and murder them. We had no reputation to back us, no money to pay a lawyer, no friends, no nothing.

"Well," I says, "now you've done it." Shan had sat him down on the ground with his knees up and his chin on them. `

"That comes of my talking," says he. "You were always grumbling at me for a shut-head chap. It's your fault," he says, "for you've given me the habit of chattering. All me life," says he, "I've been successful when I've avoided drink and talking. And now look at us."

He sits and broods.

"Well," I says to him at last, "if you can talk enough to answer a question, may I ask you what are we going to do?"

"I'm thinking," he says.

The sun was setting now and there he sat, me watching him and the black standing by. Then of a sudden he gives the ground a bang with his fist.

"Thought of a plan?" I asks him.

"Yep," says he.

Not another word could I get from him and I concluded to leave it at that and set to to get supper, opening a can of bully beef. We had water enough in our bottles and there we sat while the stars came out, champing our food and as dumb as horses.

I didn't ask questions. I didn't much care about anything. I was so sick about being done in by those hooligans I wouldn't have minded much if they'd come out with their guns and potted us as we sat. You see I'd been figuring on a fortune, enough money to let a chap lead the life he wants to, and now everything had gone snap and it looked like working in a mud dredger till kingdom come. No, sir, I wouldn't have squealed if those barny coots had come out from among those kopjes and wiped us from the face of the veldt.

I lay down when I'd finished and dropped asleep not caring and was woke by a from Shan. The black was asleep on his side and the stars were standing in the sky solid as a roof. I judged it was about midnight. There was no moon. It was just before the new. But the stars gave all the light one wanted.

"I'm off," whispered Shan.

"What for?" I asked.

"Steal back our guns," said he.

"Lord," I said, "if they catch you they'll do for the lot of us."

"Sure," said he.

"All right," I said. "It's better than tramping to Salisbury on empty bellies and maybe an army corps of hyenas for escort. Off with you, but for God's sake go soft!"

He faded off among the kopjes and I turned from my side to my back and lay with my hands under my head looking up at the stars and listening. Then I kicked the black awake in case of accident. Then I lay down again listening. The wind had «died dead and everything was silenter than a tomb but the stars seemed to shout. My mind kept hopping from the S'uthern Cross to a great, leaping brute of a star to eastward of it; it kept popping in and out of that big black hole that looks like as if some one had cut a piece out of the Milky Way with a dough punch.

I was wondering what it would feel like after I was shot and whether I'd find myself on the other side of the stars with wings on my back. Then I tried to think of all my sins but couldn't think of nothing but the old mud dredger in Beira harbor. Then I felt something running down the side of my cheek from

my mouth and wiped it off and looked at my hand; it was blood. I'd near bitten my lip through without feeling it.

Time went. I fell to thinking of Shan and his chances. If that chap could only work in silence I reckoned now was his chance of doing business. I began to think he'd funked the job or fallen as dead as the night when, crash, ripping the heart out of the night came a volley of musketry.

iii

I'D FORGOT that a single shot fired in that place would make a thousand echoes; seemed to me that the great Boer War had woke up and broke loose again among those kopjes. Then it died out and on top of the silence I heard Shan's voice shouting to me. It seemed like a dozen Shans giving tongue and I reckoned he was top dog and not calling for help and I hustled ahead, signing to the black to follow after me.

When I got to the open space where Heffernan and his pal had made their camp there was Shan standing with an automatic in each hand and there was Heffernan lying on his face under the stars and the big chap lying on his back.

Shan from what I could see had stolen up to them when they were asleep and nicked the automatics. Whether he'd potted them first or whether they'd woke up and begun the business I wasn't going to inquire. If I'd been a magistrate I'd have asked Shan why he hadn't nicked the rifles he was after instead of the automatics; but I wasn't a magistrate.

Shan without a word out of him pointed to the body of Heffernan and then away among the kopjes. Then him and me between us got it by the arms and dragged it off and dumped it a few hundred yards away out of sight. We did the same with the body of the big man, the black helping. After that we came back and sat down on top of our diamond mine and I reckon if Pd been a rooster I'd have started to crow.

"Shan," said I, "how did you do it? Spit it out, Pongo can't hear."

"Potted them," said Shan.

"Sure," said I. "You can use your left hand as good as your right and you had two automatics. You were as good as a machine-gun battery. Were they asleep when you crept in on them?"

"You bet they were," says Shan.

That was all I could get out of him and I left it at that. He'd gone back to the shuthead business and I don't blame him, seeing it was his nature and that he worked better with a muzzle on.

Next morning we turned over the dunnage of those two chaps and came on half a dozen small diamonds done up in a bit of paper. They'd spotted the

mine right enough but hadn't done more than scratched round with their knives. Then we turned to with the spade and dug like dogs for the most of that day, here and there making two or three lucky hits, but a bit disappointed on the whole. I wasn't but Shan was. He reckoned the pipe of blue clay wasn't as rich nor as big as he'd counted on. Still it was a good big fortune for the likes of us if we could bring it to market.

I didn't say that the vultures had found out Heffernan and his pal. They had, and it wasn't pleasant to hear them quarreling there, back among the kopjes all the time we were grubbing on the hunt for diamonds. Seems sort of heartless our not burying the remains seeing we had a spade, but we couldn't bring ourselves to it. Besides, what's the good? I'd a lot sooner be left lying in the open when I get like that than smothered under half a ton of clay. So we let them lie and didn't care who discovered them, for there was no one to tell, the black being deaf and dumb and Shan and myself the only parties in the know.

Next day we spent smoothing over the ground where we'd been digging so that if other parties were to come along they wouldn't see our work. Then having buried the navy revolvers and the gun belonging to those hooligans we hiked for Salisbury, our specimens in our pockets and our tails up.

iv

WE GOT along fine for the first day. I didn't bother about Shan's shut head. It was like walking with two deaf mutes but my head was so full of what I'd do with my money that I didn't want to talk. I'd been working the thing out in my head and had come to the conclusion that the De Beers stunt wasn't for us. I wasn't after a big fortune and Johannesburgis a long way from Beira. I figured that we'd better pull the Hebrew at Salisbury that had sold us our guns and gear into the show, sell out for as much as we could get and think ourselves lucky.

It wasn't only the want of ready money that made me think like that but the fact of those two dead chaps lying behind us. I knew we couldn't be touched not even for justifiable homicide, seeing that only Shan and myself could give the show away. But mind's a queer thing and that night I dreamed I was going to be hanged for doing in Heffernan and his pal. I was as innocent as a milch cow, but there you are. Dead men are dead men. Even if the chaps had been shot by Shan without a chance of shooting back they deserved their gruel since they'd stripped us of weapons and given us over to wild beasts, so to say. But still there you are. Those corpses were after me and I was unhappy. So was Shan, I ex pect, for two days later when I showed him my mind he agreed to

talk with the trader chap and sell out and quit. We did this later on and managed to get twenty-five hundred dollars gold coin out of the business. I'm getting ahead of my story, though. But not much.

What I'm coming to is a thing that happened two days later. Lord! What a volcano we were walking on all that time without knowing it— with the diamonds in our pocket and blackmail or the gallows walking either side of us.

Two days later, as I was saying, toward evening I was a long way ahead of the others. It was a bit of bad country, all broken with thorn and cactus spread in patches. Id stopped to light the camp fire when I heard the crack of an automatic. Looking back, I couldn't see anything of the others. Presently along came Shan all alone.

"Where's Pongo?" said I.

"Way back there," said Shan. "Shapira near did us."

"How's that?" I asked.

"I was behind the black," said he. "He didn't know I was so close to him. A wait-a-bit thorn ripped his leg and I heard him say 'Damn.' "

"Great Scott!" I says, "then he's not a deaf mute!"

"I bet you a dollar he is," says Shan.

But knowing Shan and his ways I didn't take him.

He'd killed the black, that was clear enough— a bit too clear for me, even though the chap deserved his gruel. I'm against killing. But there was no use talking to Shan. He'd done according to his lights and he wasn't a chap to argue with. So I kept my head shut and next morning we hiked on to Salisbury.

We had a two hours' interview with the Hebrew in a back room smelling of kerosene oil and Boer tobacco and he took the diamonds from us giving us twenty-five hundred dollars gold coin. We sold the lot, all but two, which I kept back telling Shan I had a meaning.

When we were in the street with the money in our pockets I took him by the arm and led him a bit out of the town and we sat down by the railway line on a balk of timber.

"Look here," I says, "what's wrong with De Beers?"

"I don't know," he says, "ask me another."

"I mean," says I, "what's wrong with having a try to sell them that mine? I know I was off it the other day, but it's different now. I feel a different man now we've got that money in our fists and I want more, that's a fact. The appetite comes with eating, as the Frenchmen say, and I'm hungry."

"So'm I," says Shan. "The only thing that bothers me is those three stiffs."

"Forget them," I says. "I was more nervous than you, but I've lost all that now I've touched gold. It wasn't our fault. They'd have done us in, wouldn't they? And who's ever to know? My mind's clear enough about them."

"You didn't do the killing," says Shan. "Not that I wouldn't do it again. Swabs! Only it makes a chap a bit careful. Well, I don't see why we shouldn't. There's no evidence and skeletons don't talk much. When would you start?"

"To-day," I says. "We can take the night train and we've time to get a decent rig-out first."

We started that night and a mortal long journey it was, through the Matoppos and past Palapwe and Kanga till we struck Diamond Town, never wanting to see another railway again.

We put up at the best hotel and next morning with our hearts in our mouths we came into the head office of De Beers and two minutes after we were sitting before a desk table with the acting manager at the other side of it. Just a plain sort of man without any diamonds on him, friendly sort of chap that made me feel everything was all right, and we were sure to pull off the deal.

"We've come to sell you a diamond mine," says Shan right out.

"Whereabouts?" asked the manager as if diamond mines were lying thick all round.

Then Shan begins his yarn, telling how we were out hunting and-struck blue clay and picked up two specimens, but being short of food couldn't stop to look for more.

Manager sucks it all in, then he asks again for the whereabouts.

"I can't tell you that," says Shan, "without a contract."

The manager says right out he can't make contracts on nothing and Shan had better go away and buy the land, but if he chooses to tell, the good faith of the De Beers company was a sufficient guarantee that we would be fairly dealt with.

I knew that right enough and I says: "Go on, Shan, tell it all and show the

Shan hands over the stones and spits out the location, giving so many days' march from Salisbury and the figuration of the country.

The manager goes and fetches a map and broods over it.

Then he says: "I'm sorry but you've come to sell us our own property."

"Your which?" cries Shan.

"All round there the mining rights are ours," says the manager. "At least they belong to an allied company— see the map. That blue ground you speak of is known— rather poor stuff— doubt if it will pay the working— but I hear they are beginning next month. Was no one there?"

Then it leaped into my mind that the chaps Shan had done in were no toughs but companies' men put there on guard.

"No," says Shan, "there wasn't."

"Well, I'm sorry," says the manager, "it was decent of you to come to us. These two diamonds belong to our allied company, but I'll take it on me to give them back to you for your trouble. Good day to you."

Outside I said to Shan: "Shan, those two chaps—"

"I know," says he. "Kim on! I want to get out of Africa and get out of Africa quick!"

I parted with him at Durban, he taking half our pile, near a thousand dollars, me the other half, and the last words he said were: 'Well, here's luck to you. I've been a bad man, but I'm never going to bother to be good, for as sure as certain if I get to heaven I'll find De Beers has taken the best seats."

"Well," I says, "I wouldn't worry too much about that, Shan, not till you get there."

5: A Steal For Health

Roy W. Hinds

1887-1930

Detective Story Magazine, 7 Jan 1928

THE shrewd young woman who presided at the outer desk in the Ratlein loan offices took the application in a half-hearted manner, with sharp, little upward glances. The tone of her questions dripped icily, and took the warmth out of the appealing argument John Brickman had summoned to the tip of his tongue. Lean, pallid, stoopshouldered, he found the situation taken completely and unfeelingly from his grasp.

She was a wise young woman, impervious to special appeals. One man in search of a loan was like any other, to be weighed as to the prospects of repayment and not to be considered from the standpoint of his own necessities.

“I've never borrowed a cent before, here or anywhere else,” John Brickman began, “but my family—"

Her voice sliced off the thread of his speech and, left the loose end of it dangling helplessly.

“Name and address!”

It was not an inquiry. It was a demand. He gulped, and forgot all the pitiful details he had meant to emphasize. He told her his name and address. She never seemed to look above the top button of his vest, yet Brickman felt that, somehow, she was peering into his eyes, seeing his every thought as though it were a tangible object. Her businesslike head did not move, only her heavily spectacled eyes did, up and down between the application form and the point where John Brickman’s. pale necktie disappeared beneath the lapels of his vest.

“Age?”

Another drop of ice water!

“Forty-nine,” Brickman told her.

“Married?”

“Yes, ma’am. Wife and four children.”

“Employed by?”

“The Forest State Bank.”

It was then that she looked up into his troubled eyes, not with especial interest but more with the air of one who deemed it a waste of time to proceed further. John Brickman was prepared for this. He had heard some one say that loan sharks did not like to do business with bank employees. Some bank in Forest City, a few years previously, being served by a loan broker with a notice of garnishment in connection with one of its bookkeepers, had taken

up the matter of usurious interest. They had made it hot for the loan broker; had driven him out of the city, in fact. Bank employees and newspaper reporters were dangerous to loan brokers, or, at least, the brokers thought so.

John Brickman, being aware of this obstacle, made a valiant effort to hurdle it.

“Miss,” he said, and the flatness of his voice was lost in the eagerness that drove him on, “it’s like this. The bank won’t know a thing about it. I know you don’t like banks, but—”

Again her thin lips operated as a pair of scissors on John Brickman’s speech.

“What makes you think we don’t like banks?”

“Why— well, some one told me bankers give you trouble if you have to garnishee a man who works for one of them. But you see, in my case—”

“What position do you hold at the Forest State Bank?” The young woman was crispness itself.

“Clerk in the bond and mortgage department.”

“Salary ?”

“Three thousand a year.”

“How much money do you wish to borrow?”

“Well, I was thinking: You see, I’ve got a boy seventeen years old, in high school. He’s my oldest boy, and the doctor says he’ll die if—”

“What amount, please?”

She had a way of saying “please’ which robbed the word of its courteous implication. It became, as she used it, an insistent demand for a specific statement on the part of John Brickman. But Brickman had an idea that a quick “good afternoon” would follow his request for five thousand dollars if he were not to have a chance first to submit an appeal and an argument.

“My wife’s sick too,” he said, “sick abed. And my little girl, she’s seven. I was going to tell you what I need the money for, and how important it is that I pay it back, interest and all, without the bank knowing a thing about it. I’m afraid my little girl might get the same thing the boy’s got. It’s their lungs, miss, and the doctor says—"

“How much do you wish to borrow?”

John Brickman could not escape the finality of this.

“Five thousand dollars,” he said.

She laid down the fountain pen with which she had been filling in the application form.

“I've got it figured,” Brickman pressed on, “where I can pay back a thousand a year, and interest. No doubt about it, miss! I’m only forty-nine. I’m in fine health. It’ll only take me five years— principal and interest. I didn’t just come dashing up here. I’ve been thinking about it a long time, and know just

what I can do. A thousand a year and interest. I don't drink. I'm a steady worker. I think maybe I'm going to get a raise the first of the year. I might be able to clean the whole thing up in four years. You see—"

"Do you own your home or do you pay rent?"

"We pay rent."

"Own a car?"

"No, ma'am."

"Collateral of any kind?"

"No, I haven't, miss. That is, I haven't just now. But if I could borrow five thousand here, I'd pay off the mortgage on my furniture, and then offer that 4

"How much is that mortgage?"

"Only two hundred dollars, and a little interest."

She had not even bothered to pick up the fountain pen.

"The largest salary loan we ever make," she announced, "is a thousand dollars. To borrow a thousand dollars, a man must have an income of five thousand a year."

"Yes, I know. A friend of mine said you had rules like that, but I thought Well, I've worked for the Forest State Bank nineteen years, miss. I've got to hold that job. If I don't pay my debts, I'll lose the job. We've got to send the boy and the little girl out West for a year, the doctor says, and my wife has got to have special treatment. Oh, I know I can pay the money back. I get a salary check the first of every month, and I'll come right up here as soon as the bank closes and make my payment— once a month. You can't lose!"

The pen remained on the desk.

"I cannot submit your application, Mr."— she looked at the form— "Brickman. It's a waste of time."

Brickman's lips tightened, then opened.

"Can I see Mr. Ratlein?" he asked.

"He is out of the city."

"Well," he begged, "you take my application, anyhow. I'll write a letter to file with it. I'll show you people that if you'll break your rules for me— why, I'll show you how I've got to pay off the loan! I won't borrow another cent for five years. I've never borrowed a penny on my salary. With the little mortgage on my furniture paid off, this'll be the only debt I've got. I'll lay aside so much of my salary every month to make my payments— a thousand a year and interest. You take my application. I can explain things in a letter. I'm not much of a talker, and—"

"Its against orders," she informed him, "for me to take an application whose terms are contrary to our rules."

And so ended John Brickman's negotiations in that quarter.

THE BUSTLE of Forest City's main street, the clamor of street cars, the noise of traffic, the stir of pedestrians were lost upon him. His mind was elsewhere. He walked— alone with his thoughts, and so pressing were they that the operation of clambering aboard a car, paying his fare, and taking a seat was more mechanical than it was conscious. He saw nothing of the streets through which the car passed; at least, nothing made any impression on him.

Yet he was smiling when he entered his own front door. He was practiced in this phase of domestic deception, of making his family think he was cheerful and confident when he was not. Of his four children, only two were well. To his wife's anxious questions that morning, he had replied vaguely that he had hopes of raising money during the day. Yes, he thought, he might be able to start the oldest son and the little girl on the Western trip within a few days.

The eyes of the family had for several days been turned westward, ever since the doctor issued his pronouncement regarding the oldest boy's lungs. The little girl, too, he had said. There were colonies out there where both would be received and treated. He could make the arrangements by telegraph, once John Brickman notified him he had the necessary money.

The boy was in bed, on a sleeping porch at the rear of the house. The ittle girl was not so badly off, and was playing about the yard. The wife was in bed, and her condition, too, demanded special treatment, though that could be obtained in a hospital in Forest City. Yet no move could be made, and John Brickman felt like a man in chains.

He suffered fits of inward rage, brought on by realization of his own futility. When no member of his family looked at him, his face was dark and scowling.

He looked at the boy on the porch, talked with him a few moments, and again mentally mortgaged his soul if some unseen power would trade for it the miraculous, healing air of the West.

"It's only air they need," he said to himself, thinking of the boy and the girl. "Air— the cheapest thing in the world! And I can't get it for them. But," he. added, walking toward. his wife's room, "I will get it."

To her he said:

"Well, things look better, Mary. I had a talk to-day about a loan. Nothing definite. No promise, but it looks favorable! You see, Mary, my nineteen years with the Forest State Bank counts for something now. It isn't what a man makes that gets him credit. It's his attitude toward his debts. Well, I've always paid mine. Yes, yes, Mary, things look good. But borrowing money is a slow business. There's a lot of red tape to it. Don't fret at a day or two, Mary,"

He knew that her restlessness included no thought of herself. He sat at the bedside, holding her hand, and thinking. And then, suddenly, the thought that he must get the money in any way he could came to him. It persisted and would not give him peace.

"As a last resort," he told himself. "Only as a last resort. Five thousand! Bonds! Five thousand! Then one at atime! Pay them back, one at a time.

A hundred bonds, fifty dollars apiece. Negotiable, unregistered! Yes, they've got to be unregistered. I can buy them back, one at a time, and replace them."

These reflections were with him— eating and walking and working. They were with him when he awakened in the night. They frightened him. He studied his face in every mirror he encountered. A troubled, haggard face!

"But that doesn't show," he assured himself. "That thought, it doesn't show."

At the bank, his mind was now constantly in quest of a way, a safe and fool-proof way. Thousands and thousands of dollars in bonds were within reach of his fingers much of the time, but a brazen theft would only bring disaster. If five thousand dollars' worth of bonds should come up missing, and John Brickman made a big outlay of money within' a few days thereafter

He had exhausted every last possibility for the acquisition of five thousand dollars by any other means. The initial expenses of putting his wife on. special treatment at the hospital and of getting his two children established in the West, with assurances of the best medical treatment, would run to well over four thousand.

John Brickman had not much time. Seeking an opportunity, he recognized it instantly. Similar chances had come every few day for years and years, but he had not thought of them. Now he did think.

JOHN BRICKMAN, sitting at his desk in the bond and mortgage department, on the mezzanine floor of the Forest State Bank, looked down upon the busy scene on the banking floor.

The entire bank was within his range of vision; the tellers and clerks inside the wicket, the corridors now comfortably filled with customers, big Matt McLaren, dressed in a gray uniform, the bank's own policeman. Matt eyed every stranger who came in. He had a quick, shrewd gaze, a faculty of cataloguing men instantly. If one looked dangerous or the least bit furtive, as though he might have a "sour" check to pass or a gun to thrust into a teller's face, he got out from under Matt's surveillance only when he passed from the bank.

Matt had given more than one wink to a paying teller who was about to cash a check that appeared genuine. The delay thus brought about sometimes saved money for the bank and led to the capture of a crook. Not always, of course! Matt's judgment was not infallible, and honest transactions had sometimes been delayed because of his warning wink. The customer never knew the exact reason for the delay, as tellers have a way of postponing payment without seeming to imply distrust; yet an honest man can have no complaint against the precautions of a bank. Some of the strangers, however, turned out to be crooks, and it was these successes which atoned for Matt McLaren's mistakes.

He had come to be more than a policeman, a day watchman. He was a detective. He had achieved celebrity in Forest City some few months previously, and regular customers of the bank usually stopped for a word with Matt on their way in or out of the bank.

John Brickman's gaze fastened on Matt McLaren. A tint of envy colored his meditations, as he sat at his desk, watching.

"Now there's Matt McLaren," John Brickman ruminated. "He's been with this bank only about three years, and look what he's got. Close to ten thousand dollars in one bunch!"

Brickman was thinking of the rewards that had come to Matt McLaren, the biggest amount when he captured single-handed four holdup men who had dashed out of the bank after a stick-up at the paying teller's window. Matt had been wounded twice by pistol shots, but he wounded two of the bandits and held the other two under threat of his gun until the police arrived. Matt's wounds had healed, and he was back on the job. The holdup men were in the penitentiary.

Matt's rewards for that job totaled nearly ten thousand dollars. The bandits had been wanted in various cities, and numerous premiums were on their heads. The Forest State Bank made Matt a present of one thousand dollars. Identification of the robbers, with the news that Matt McLaren had captured them, brought in other rewards.

Matt had profited, too, by the occasional apprehension of an "inker"— forger, or a "lifter'"— check raiser.

"It's all luck," John Brickman ruminated. "Put Matt at my desk here, and he couldn't earn his salt. But down there on the floor, just watching people, he picks up a fortune. And what's he got? Nothing but strength and nerve, and a quick eye. He can't add up a column of figures, but he can pick out a crook. Well, he ought to. He traveled with 'em once. He knows 'em— knows how they look when they're up to something. At that, Matt's a good scout, and I shouldn't be sitting here thinking unkind things about him."

Yet, Brickman could not help feeling envious, and disgruntled over the breaks of life. Matt McLaren had a small fortune tucked away, all earned since he entered the employ of the bank as a watchman. He had been a gangster, a pugilist—never a crook himself, but a man who lived in the seamy quarter of the city and rubbed elbows with crooks. None ever said that Matt McLaren was a crook, that he ever stole a penny. His crimes, in the days he ran with gangs in the slums, were confined to assault and battery. He had fought with the gangs for the sheer love of fighting, but, approaching middle age, had given up drinking and fighting and gone in quest of a job.

The president of the Forest State Bank, who had sat at the ringside at several of Matt's professional pugilistic encounters and who admired his physical prowess, took him on as a watchman. Matt had a hard, fight-scarred countenance, and a big, powerful body. He was a formidable figure in the corridors of the bank, a compelling and admirable figure in the neat, gray uniform.

He had hung onto the job by the simple process of staying sober and paying attention to his duties. As time went on, he proved his value by the occasional apprehension of a crook.

"And I've been with this bank nineteen years," John Brickman continued meditatively. "Chained to this desk nineteen years. I've saved the bank money too, by catching mistakes in bond shipments. Caught a lot of mistakes in nineteen years, but the things I do for the bank don't stick out like Matt's work. He gets his name in the papers, and the rewards flow in. I don't do no shooting and I don't grab no crooks by the neck and hand .'em over to a policeman.

"Did this bank ever give me a reward? I should say not! I remember the time I recovered thirty thousand dollars in bonds, all wrapped up in another package and about to be shipped to the wrong place. Maybe they'd have come back and maybe they wouldn't. No one knows. But it was me who got the hunch that the bonds were addressed wrong, tucked in with another shipment. It was me who opened that package and took 'em out, and spoke to the cashier about it. He was so nervous with joy that he fairly yelled. He said, "Thanks, Brickman, thanks! That's a fine piece of work. I won't forget this, Brickman. I won't!'"

John Brickman's lips tightened, and a hard look crept into his usually mild eyes.

"But he did forget it," he reflected. "Never mentioned it again. Never gave me a raise, nor any work that amounted to promotion. Now, if I had caught a holdup man stealing thirty thousand dollars from the bank, why, I'd have been a hero! Name in the papers, a big fat check presented to me in the presence of the bank staff, with a speech by the president, and all that stuff. But no! I

rescued those bonds too quietly; mentioned it in a whisper to the cashier. And he thanked me in whispers. A fellow's got to make a noise if he wants to get on in this world."

His reflections broke off sharply. The opening he had been sparring for, for several days, dawned at that moment.

The incident that gave John Brickman his cue happened near the big front doors of the Forest State Bank. It was Monday morning.

Jeff Fisher, a skinny little man, who looked more like an unsuccessful book agent than he did like a brokerage messenger, stepped into the bank and began to talk to Matt McLaren. John Brickman knew what Jeff Fisher was after.

Bonds! Twenty-five thousand dollars' worth perhaps, Thirty thousand, thirty-five! None could say exactly until Jeff presented the written order of the brokerage house for which he worked.

But the amount would be large, and the makeup of the order of such character that six thousand dollars of it could be extracted with comparative safety.

Six thousand dollars' worth of bonds would net John Brickman around five thousand. In the shady quarter of the city, there were places where the bonds could be disposed of without questions. Gilt-edged securities like that were almost like so much cash. John Brickman had heard of a sleazy little pawnbroker who bought such bonds, bought them from holdup men and embezzlers.

John had been talking with Matt McLaren. He had talked, too, with a newspaper reporter of his acquaintance. Both liked to talk of criminals and their ways. Brickman had been very careful, getting his information in such way as to leave no hint he wanted it for his own use. He showed merely» a normal curiosity in crime and the disposition of ldot. Scores of respectable citizens, after Matt became celebrated in the city as a man uncommonly versed in the ways of the underworld, had asked him the same questions. Why, even the president of the bank had quizzed Matt for details as to how crooks worked, from the moment a theft was conceived to the get-away and sale of the loot.

Matt McLaren would never suspect that John Brickman himself had thievery in mind. John knew that buyers of stolen securities paid high for the kind of bonds he meant to filch, for there was a minimum of chance in handling them. Bonds of big-face values and registered brought little to the thief.

But Jeff Fisher, who was still talking to Matt McLaren, was after bonds of a small-face value and unregistered.

The brokerage house did a big business with such securities. It had a long list of clients in the wage-earning class, thrifty customers from the factories, who sent their women to buy bonds on Mondays, following the Saturday pay

days. The brokerage house, buying bonds in large amounts, got them cheaper than individual buyers could, and sold them a shade cheaper than the banks could sell small lots.

The buyers were of a class which did not wish to be bothered by the intricacies of registration and reassignment if they sought a quick turnover,

With six thousand dollars' worth of them in hand, John Brickman saw himself with at least five thousand in cash before the week was out.

One hundred and twenty bonds of fifty dollars each—six thousand dollars! One hundred and twenty pieces of paper, new, in compact bunches. He could carry them in his pockets, and properly scattered, there would be no telltale bulge.

In about an hour, he would go to lunch.

But Jeff Fisher, the brokerage messenger, was spending an unusually long time in conversation with Matt McLaren. They talked earnestly. Jeff, whose hat came about to Matt's collar, stood with his back tô John Brickman's desk. Matt faced that part of the mezzanine floor occupied by Brickman. John could look down upon the pair.

Matt's eyes glowed unde? the peak of his policeman's cap. He gazed down into the upturned eyes of the undersized messenger. Jeff's hands performed gestures. He did most of the talking.

John Brickman was puzzled until he remembered that both Jeff and Matt were rabid baseball fans. The world series games were scheduled to begin two days hence. Matt and Jeff were inveterate bettors on sporting events. They often exchanged news as to where money could be put down to the best advantage.

"They're probably putting up dough on the games," Brickman concluded. "That's why they're so serious. Baseball nuts, both of 'em."

The cautious looks that Matt McLaren occasionally turned into the street, through the open doors of the bank, impressed John Brickman only as the habitual glances of a policeman on duty.

Jeff walked to the stairway leading to the mezzanine floor, and up. Brickman watched him lay a slip of paper on the bond cashier's desk. The cashier at once turned it over to a vault clerk. Within a few minutes the order, in sealed bunches and each wrapper labeled, lay on a metal tray on a table just outside the vault.

The vault clerk came to John Brickman's desk and laid thereon the order slip brought to the bank by Jeff Fisher.

The moment was at hand, yet John Brickman's fingers did not tremble even a tiny bit as he picked up the slip. His knees were as firm as ever when he got up and walked across the room. There was no vision of himself as a thief in his

mind— nothing but the haggard face of his son, and the gauntly bright eyes of his little girl. He saw his wife, too, on her bed of pain.

On that tray lay health for all three. Sour bitterness was in John Brickman's heart, for, wherever he had tried to borrow money, he had not only been rebuffed, but rebuffed in a way that stung. He was a man up against the extremity of his last recourse, and driven by the goad of family misfortune.

Now he was bending over the tray. The order slip lay beside it. He had a pencil in one hand, He had noticed, by the list, that the bonds would be exactly what he wanted— of small denominations, unregistered, and giltedged, worth to any man almost the full face value. Easily convertible into cash, and in the slums there were shady characters who would be glad to get their hands on them for the profit they could make between John Brickman's five thousand and the six thousand he meant to spirit away. No questions would be demanded. Brickman's name would not even be asked. None could say whether he was a holdup man or an embezzler, nor could they say that the bonds came from any bank in Forest City.

The bank would not advertise the theft. The bank would be unable to say when it was committed. None except John Brickman knew how cleverly he had planned this.

From his lowered eyes, John Brickman stole a furtive look over the parts of the department visible to him. He saw only the backs of a clerk and a bookkeeper. The other desks were out of sight from the vault and the table at which Brickman worked, he being in an alcove.

The time was ripe. He had mentally selected the packets he meant to swipe from the tray.

There was a drawer in the table. John Brickman's alibi was in the drawer, put there just before the close of business Saturday afternoon. The alibi consisted of a dozen packets looking exactly like many of the packets on the tray. From the bank he had taken pieces of the thin, tough, wrapping paper used on parcels of bonds, as well as a variety of the printed binders, containing descriptions of standard bonds in which the bank dealt, as well as labeled amounts. He saw that he would need only six of the dozen packets he had prepared, but he had fortified himself with more in order to make a wise selection and to cover up adequately at the moment of the theft.

He unlocked the drawer and slid into it the six packets of bonds he meant to steal.

Then he put in their place on the tray six packets which had reposed in the drawer since Saturday evening. These contained blank pieces of paper, cut to the size of the bonds. The binders on them seemed to show that the packets

contained bonds of a different description, but of the same face value, than the packets he had removed from the tray.

The drawer was locked now, and the key in his pocket. Brickman, the order slip in one hand, raised a scowling face, He barked:

“Benny!”

Benny. was the vault clerk. He came hurrying.

“You’ve got this order twisted,” John Brickman told him.

Benny had made mistakes before. He was young and anxious to make good on the job. His manner was apologetic as he bent over the table.

“See here,” Brickman pointed out, still grouchy, and proceeded to show Benny where he had apparently put six packets onto the tray, whose descriptions did not fit the order.

It was unusual for John Brickman to be grouchy. To all office boys and under clerks he was known as a good guy, amiable, gently spoken, patient with their mistakes.

“I’m awful serry, Mr. Brickman,”

Benny said. “I was careful about that order too. If Mr. Barnes finds this out—"

“He won’t find it out, Benny,” Brickman assured him in a softer tone. “Say nothing about it, and I won’t, only watch yourself, Benny. Barnes won’t stand for many mistakes in bond orders, but we’ll let this one slide.”

“Thanks, Mr. Brickman. Gee! I’m glad you found it, instead of Mr. Thorley. Hed go right to Mr. Barnes.”

“All right, all right, Benny! You skip along. I'll fix it up.”

“Thanks— thanks, Mr. Brickman!”

So John Brickman took the six packets of blank paper and went into the vault. He traded them for six packets of bonds bearing labels identical with the worthless bundles and each stamped “$1000.” The latter he put on the tray. The packages containing blank paper had been arranged with the other: bonds so that they would not be reached for several weeks, in the ordinary course of business, and then only one or two at a time.

The substitutions might be discovered in some distant city, to which the bank often. made shipments. Who could say where the theft was committed, in the bank or along the line somewhere.

John Brickman had in the locked drawer of the table, just outside the vault, six thousand dollar's worth of bonds.

No one but Benny, the vault clerk, knew he had been in the vault, and Benny could be depended on not to say anything about it. If anything came up a few weeks hence, and Benny was questioned, John Brickman could say, if Benny related the incident, that the bonds he took back into the vault were of

some other kind than actually they were. Benny would handle thousands of packages of bonds meanwhile. Details would soon slip from his mind.

At noon, John Brickman took the bonds home. He concealed them in the basement. After the bank closed in the afternoon, he took home the six extra packages of blank paper with which he had provided himself in case he needed them.

Before burning these, he opened the packets, to be sure that he had made no mistake and got the bonds mixed with the subterfuges in the drawer. He made no mistake. He burned the packages of blank paper, and looked into the packages of bonds.

There they were, in the basement of his home— and good for five thousand dollars in cash.

Yet, that evening, he lacked the spirit to go into the shady quarter of the city, as he had planned, and make arrangements for the conversion into money. He put it off.

At his desk next morning, John Brickman saw much more clearly than he had at any time since his troubles descended upon him. He had slept little.

“Much better to lose the family,” he reflected, “than to save it like this. Much better that we should all sink.”

He forced himself to look his fellow workers in the eye.

About ten o’clock, he assured himself that he would go home at noon, recover the stolen bonds, and with them replace the spurious packets he had planted in the vault. This might be difficult, of course, for it would be necessary for him to formulate another excuse to go into the vault. But he would manage it somehow.

“There must be a way,” he kept saying to himself, “to get what I need honestly. Why, even if the boy and the little girl came back in fine health, I'd never be able to look ’em in the eye again.”

At that moment he was not thinking of discovery and the penalties and disgrace incident thereto. He thought of himself only as a thief under cover, forced to live a lie all the remainder of his days. Conscience, stifled, thrust back, while the crime was under way, was asserting itself now.

Sight of Matt McLaren, the bank’s policeman, talking with a plain-clothes man whom Brickman knew by sight did not alarm him. His theft could not possibly have been discovered, nor even suspected,

“I always thought that thieves worried about arrest,” he ruminated. “It ought to ease my mind to think I’ve got the bonds and covered things up so cleverly, But I can’t ease my mind without putting those bonds back.”

There was no element of terror in his reflections.

Yet that came very quickly, at quarter past ten, to be exact.

The bond cashier came to John Brickman's desk,

"We've just got a big order," he said. "It will clean us up, or just about, on the fifties and hundreds. Get some one to work with you, and hustle it out." That meant, very soon, the discovery of the theft.. It was a local order, to be delivered to the brokerage house for which Jeff Fisher worked. They were probably making a big out-of-town shipment, yet every package of bonds would be opened in the brokerage house, and the contents checked before the shipment was assembled for reconsignment.

The packets containing the blank pieces of paper would be opened.

Benny, the vault clerk, would be questioned at once. What had happened yesterday would be fresh in his mind. Everything would come down with a crash. Benny would remember the labels.

John Brickman thought of things he had never thought of before. Friends of his could say that he was sorely pressed for money, that he had been trying for two or three weeks to borrow five thousand dollars,

He could not go home until noon, Working with another clerk, as he was now, he could not slip the stolen bonds back into place and remove the dummy packets, even if he had had the plunder on his person.

In just a short time, every package of fifty-dollar bonds and hundreddollar bonds in the bank would be on the way to the brokerage house. They were being handed out to him by the other clerk. A bookkeeper sat at the table, right under John Brickman's nose, checking the packets.

He had no chance to spirit the phony packets out of the mass that came to him from the vault. Indeed, not seeing the clerk inside removing them, he could not identify the false bundles among the real.

The clerk's voice inside droned his descriptions. John Brickman's voice droned too as he repeated them, and so did the bookkeeper's as he spoke after them. Each word and each spoken figure was a note in the dirge that sang in John Brickman's soul.

Because of what Benny could say, suspicion would point its finger at John Brickman almost at once. He would probably be taken to police headquarters and pumped for hours. He did not think he would be able to bear up.

Disgrace would fall on the Brickman family very soon now, and crush it. with a heavier weight than illness could ever do.

But John Brickman was caught in a vise. The life was being slowly squeezed out of him by the pressure of circumstances that compelled him to go through with his appointed duty, and thus speed the moment of disaster,

Presently, the consignment of bonds was ready. It was carried out of the bank by two men sent by the brokerage house. This was too big an order for

little Jeff Fisher to handle. There was probably a guarded car outside ready to receive the bonds, maybe an armored car,

John Brickman sat down at his desk, to await the crash.

A few seconds later he saw Matt McLaren, in, civilian clothes, leave ‘the bank by a side door.

“That’s funny,” Brickman thought. “I never knew him to take off his uniform during banking hours. Thought he didn’t eat lunch till three o’clock. Wonder if they’re using him as a guard for that bond shipment?”

But there was nothing that John Brickman could do but wait. He estimated that the bonds would arrive at the brokerage house within the next twenty minutes. Opening the packets and checking probably would start at once, since it was a hurry-up order. Discovery would come any moment thereafter, depending on when the first dummy package was encountered.

“They'll probably telephone the bank,” John Brickman thought. “They’ll hustle through the shipment, after they find the first fake bundle, They’ll soon have the news— six bundles of blank paper. Six thousand dollars lifted, I wonder how my face will look when they ask me the first question?”

And then, a few moments later, startling news came into the bank and spread like wildfire. It was spreading over the city, too, to the music of gunfire and pursuit.

The automobile transporting bonds had been held up.

It was a successful holdup, too, one of those daring jobs in a crowded street that makes every one ask, “How in the world could they do it?”

But the holdup men, traveling in another car, with confederates probably in other cars around them, had done it, The bandits fired no shots. Pursuers fired, but so far as known, hit no one.

The bond shipment was in the hands of bandits. Bandits, and not the brokerage house and the bank, would come across those six packages of blank paper, They would swear a little perhaps, with the loot cut short six thousand dollars, but their swearing and their discomfiture could not harm John Brickman.

Nothing could harm John Brickman now, not even recovery of the bonds. Would not every one think the thieves had started to substitute blank paper for the bonds in the packets, for some mysterious reason of their own? If the whole consignment was recovered, who could say that the thieves had not quickly got away with six thousand dollars of the loot—passed that much to a confederate in another car?

John Brickman was safe. Disaster had been miraculously whisked from above his head.

He had six thousand dollars in negotiable bonds in the basement of his home. The evidence of his crime was wiped out.

Yet, amid the excitement and commotion in the bank, John Brickman's lean body sagged in his chair. His hands lay helplessly in his lap.

News kept filtering into the bank. Pursuers had not caught the bandits. All sight of them had been lost. None of the loot had been recovered.

Brickman saw very clearly now. The upheaval in his soul had quieted down. Somehow, he knew just what had happened inside him. Out of the welter of fright and remorse, that had torn at his nerves since he hid the stolen bonds in his basement, came one clear thought. His mind was no longer a turmoil of surmises and doubts. His head nodded briskly, as he got up to join a knot of bank employees talking about the holdup.

"It makes my job all the harder," he muttered, "but I'll do it!"

The clerks in the bond and mortgage department were asked not to take the usual time for lunch; merely to dodge out to the nearest restaurant, eat as quickly as possible, and return. The police would want several lists of the stolen bonds. Work should be started on them at once.

John Brickman did not have time to go home that noon.

Suspects in the bond robbery had been taken into custody, but not one packet of the loot had been recovered.

Matt McLaren returned to the .bank about two o'clock and donned his policeman's uniform, after a talk with the cashier. Matt had been one of the guards in the car that was held up, but was unable to do anything toward saving the bonds. He had joined in the pursuit.

"I've been ordered not to talk about it,' he said to.every one in the bank who asked him about the holdup.

John Brickman, sitting at his desk and thinking of what he meant to do after the doors of the bank were closed at three, studied Matt McLaren.

"I think I'll talk it over with Matt first," he decided. "He knows thieves, and maybe he can give me some advice, I'd like to talk with some one. Matt's always been friendly with me."

He went down to the banking floor, and said to Matt:

"I'd like to have a talk with you at three o'clock, Matt. Can you come up to my desk?"

"I can't talk about the holdup, Mr. Brickman," Matt replied; "to no one."

"I know that. I want to talk about something else just as important. I've got a surprise for you."

"I'll be up and see you," Matt promised,

Matt changed into his civilian clothes as soon as the bank closed. Employees began to drift out soon thereafter, though there were others who

would work until four or half past. At John Brickman's desk, there was chance for private conversation.

"Matt," John Brickman said, "I stole six thousand dollars in bonds yesterday."

Matt stared at him in amazement, and looked around cautiously, as though some one else should discover, too, that John Brickman had gone insane.

"It's no joke, Matt, and I'm in my right mind. Listen!"

He told Matt McLaren the story to its last detail— motives, the way he did the job, everything.

"And I'm going to return those bonds to the bank," Brickman confided. "I can't see my way to do it without confessing, but they've got to be returned. I can't drop them in the vault and say we missed them when we were making up the shipment. The other clerk will know better, the bookkeeper too, and the men that checked the bonds while putting them in the grips. And I've got to take the blame for it, Matt. If I just dropped them in the vault, every one who works around here would be suspected."

This was true. It would be evident that some one's conscience got the bet ter of him. Every one who had a chance to steal from the vault would be under suspicion indefinitely.

"Where're the bonds at?" Matt inquired.

"In the basement of my home."

"Could I go up there and get 'em?"

"Why— well, yes, you could, but—"

"I got a scheme," Matt announced.

John Brickman took hope. He told Matt exactly where the bonds were, at the bottom of an old trunk filled with discarded books and junk. Brickman had the key to the trunk, He could give Matt a note to some one at his house.

"You stay here, wait for me here," Matt instructed. "PI go get them bonds, and come back. Got work to do that's maybe an excuse for staying after every one else goes?"

"Yes, I can: fix that,"

Matt went down to the banking floor, Brickman saw him enter the cashier's private office, but he knew that Matt had probably been called in there to answer more questions about the holdup. He saw a teller take into the cashier's office a large sum of emoney, having got it just before the downstairs vault was closed.

Then Brickman saw Matt McLaren go out.

Matt was back in less than two hours. There was no one in the bank now but the night watchman and John Brickman. The watchman let Matt in.

"I couldn't find them bonds," Matt said.

"You couldn't— Whats that, Matt?"

"I couldn't find no bonds in that trunk. If you ain't kidding me, Mr. Brickman, you better go home and search that cellar o' yourn. Darned if there's any bonds anywhere in that trunk!"

"Why— why, there are too! In a wooden box, at the bottom of the trunk. I left them there. No one— no one saw me—"

"Well, you better go find 'em."

John Brickman tore out of the bank, and home.

With a haggard face, he lifted the lid of the trunk, and dropped to his knees. He could see that the junk in it had been disturbed since he last looked into it, but that, of course, could have been done by Matt McLaren, who had been there a short time earlier. He dug down to the bottom and hauled out the box.

He opened it. The box was empty except for a long envelope addressed to himself, in the crude hand he knew as Matt McLaren's. It was a bulky envelope. John Brickman ripped it open.

There were six pieces of paper in the envelope. One was a folded sheet of letter paper covered with writing.

The other five were alike— five thousand-dollar bills.

Matt's letter ran:

Take a tip from me. Don't never try stealing. There's them that can do it and them that can't. You are a fellow that can't, which is why I am loaning you this five thousand dollars. You can pay me from your salary. I got plenty of money and it don't make so much difference if I don't get this back for ten years. I would sooner trust you than lots of fellows who give their note and put up security. You proved that when you give the bonds back after you found there was no evidence against you.

Now listen to me, only don't say nothing at the bank in the morning if the news ain't public yet. It will be public if they catch the gang and the kingpin of it as they aim to do. That mob did not get the bonds. They got packages of blank paper marked like bonds. Only a few at the bank know it. The bonds was taken off your floor in the elevator down to the basement and put in the safe in the safety-deposit department. I helped handle them and the bundles of blank paper.

We dumped the bonds out and threw the other bundles in the grips. It will be easy for me to say I found some packages of bonds that must of got away from me in the hurry, and I will say maybe there's some bundles of blank paper among the bonds. Leave it to me! I will fix it, and they trust me. They will believe any lie that I say. That holdup was framed after Jeff Fisher found fellows following him. The brokers and the bank and the police fixed it for news of a big bond shipment to get scattered around and they pulled the shipment as bait, laying for a gang the police been after a long time.

They let them pull the holdup so as the gang would lead them to the kingpin of the mob. They maybe will get him before the night is over, as there will be an awful mixup and maybe some fights in that gang when they come acress the blank paper in them bundles,

Detectives are watching the. house where the gang is at, waiting for the leader to show up. They will get him, and there will be a big reward for me and Jeff Fisher. We give the tip to the bank and the brokers, and the police framed up the holdup. I guess I can afford to lend five thousand dollars, which is like putting it in a bank to loan it to a fellow who wants to give back something he stole after there ain't no chance of him getting found out. I hope your kids and wife get well.

John Brickman, sobbing and laughing hysterically, ran upstairs to his family. In one hand he held the torn bits of Matt McLaren's letter, with the other he waved the five one-thousand-dollar bills.

"I must call the doctor!" he cried. "I 've got it— got the five thousand, and now you'll all get well!"

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6: A Business Training

Edgar Wallace

1875-1932

Pan: The Fiction Magazine, April 1922

The Grand Magazine, Nov 1931

Collected in: *For Information received*, 1929

IT was Winifred Laudermere who suggested the business course. She and Tom and Jarnach were lunching one day to celebrate a successful piece of financing— it was the day Jarnach persuaded their father to put up the money for his motor car company.

And when the conversation came round to Lambie, Winifred snorted. She always snorted at the mention of the Laudermere "baby," not, as she was at pains to explain, because she was jealous of her half-sister, but because:

"Well, father gets positively senile over that kid. He sends frantic wires to Lausanne, if Lambie's letter doesn't arrive in time for Tuesday's breakfast, and did you hear about his flying— actually flying in a specially chartered aeroplane to Switzerland when she had measles? Flying! and he hates looking out of a third floor window!"

"It must have cost a lot of money," said Tom, with a disapproving frown, "you cannot hire aeroplanes for nothing. I hate to see the old man wasting money."

Any money that rose beyond the reach of Tom Laudermere's rod was wasted. Jarnach suggested as much.

"That's rot," disputed Winifred, "you know father is a fool about the kid. When she comes home from school she'll be unbearable, and so will he. I've written to him— did he say anything about my letter when you saw him this morning, Tom?"

Tom yawned. Lambie was a subject which bored him more readily than any other.

"Yes, he did— said that you had suggested Lambie should take a sort of intensive Business Course— do they take Business Courses at Swiss convents? Tell me, somebody?"

"Of course they do!" said Winifred scornfully, "and—"

"But why this brilliant suggestion, and why this devotion to the interests of Lambie," asked Jarnach curiously.

Winifred raised her pencilled eyebrows and regarded her younger brother with marked patience.

"Lambie must be provided for," she said primly; "anything may happen to father— especially now that he has taken to galivanting around in aeroplanes.

Besides if she gets a real business training, she'll be crazy to go into an office, or into politics, or something. We don't want her at home."

The last six words had significant pause and emphasis.

"You sound like one of the ugly sisters disposing of poor Cinderella," said Jarnach lazily. "It is all very enterprising and schemish, and I agree. Not that Lambie wants providing for. She had a heap of money of her own. Mary left her a lot."

"Mary" was their father's second wife.

"I agree anyway," said Tom, nodding at the liqueur whose colour he was admiring at the moment, "we don't want the old man to keep her at home spoiling her and all that sort of thing— here's luck."

Therefore was the intensive business training of "Lambie" Laudermere approved.

THERE WAS a very demure, straight-backed girl at the Convent of Maria Theressa at Lausanne. She had a soft voice, a pair of solemn grey eyes, and a certain grave sweetness of manner which endeared her to the good sisters and helped her to a well-deserved popularity amongst the lower fifth.

She had other qualities no less pleasing. One day (some eighteen months after her relatives had sketched her future to their satisfaction) the Reverend Mother sent for "Lambie" Laudermere and Lambie went meekly to the big cool study with its great wistaria framed windows.

The Mother Superior looked up from her desk with a smile at the slim figure with the folded hands.

The Principal of Maria Theressa had once been the wife of a rich Paris banker (you may remember, if you are over forty, the tragic death of the Count Henri d'Avignon and the retirement of his beautiful widow to the cloisters of Avro), and she was a wise woman who had known human love and something of human frailty.

"Sit down, Lambie," she said gently. She used the pet name which Mary Lambton Laudermere had borne since her arrival at the convent. The Superior took a little packet of letters from her desk.

"Do you know these?" she asked.

Lambie flushed pink.

"Yes, Reverend Mother," she said quietly. Sister Agatha nodded.

"These are letters written by a foolish girl to a man— who is not foolish," she said. "They might have brought great unhappiness to poor Viola Willus and greater unhappiness to her parents. We owe you a debt of gratitude for their recovery."

There was a silence, and Lambie changed her feet uncomfortably.

"I am curious to know," the Mother Superior went on, "how you induced Mr. Sigee— who, I think, is no more than a vulgar blackmailer— to part with these precious letters."

Lambie smiled— a faint, fleeting smile that dawned and vanished in a second.

"I met him in the garden last night," she said after a moment's hesitation, "you know, Reverend Mother, that I begged Viola to come to you, but the poor kid— child, I mean— simply hadn't the nerve. She's been to you since, I see," she nodded toward the letters, "and so I went. He was awfully surprised to see me instead of Viola, but he condescended to discuss things. It was quite innocent— Viola's affair, I mean."

The Superior nodded.

"It was one of those garden wall affairs that you read in—" she stopped, not desiring to admit her acquaintance with forbidden classics.

"In— let us say— Thomas à Kempis," said the Reverend Mother smoothly, "go on, dear."

Again the fleeting smile swifter than ever.

"And Viola wrote the letters and threw them over the wall, and he wanted her to meet him and threatened he would go to you if she did not agree. He gabbled on, such a vain little man, Reverend Mother! I think he is a jockey in one of the Italian stables. I told him how naughty it was of Viola, and what an awful row there would be, but he just prinked and beamed— but perhaps you don't know what I mean, Reverend Mother?"

Sister Agatha smiled.

"Prinking and beaming are two accomplishments with which I am well acquainted. Go on, please."

"So I asked him if he had her letters, and he produced them."

" 'Can I read them?' I asked, and he was awfully pleased with himself and said I might. So I took them and put them into my pocket."

"What happened then?"

Lambie's lips were twitching, and presently she broke into a fit of uncontrollable laughter.

"I'm so sorry, Reverend Mother!" she gasped, drying her eyes, but the Mother Superior was laughing too. Perhaps she had heard an account of this meeting from another source.

"He blustered a little," Lambie went on, "and threatened what he would do to me— so I just binged him and ran!"

"You—?" asked the puzzled Mother Superior.

"I binged him— like this."

Lambie swung her arm round in a circle.

"You hit him?" said the horrified Superior, yet in her horror there was reluctant admiration.

Lambie nodded.

"I just binged him," she said complacently. "It hurt my hand awfully— but I couldn't help doing it; he was such a little wor—, little man, Reverend Mother. I knew he wouldn't follow, and if he did I could beat him for speed— and that's all, Reverend Mother."

The Mother Superior looked at the girl long and steadily.

"I used to be afraid what would happen when you returned home to your people," she said. "Your father I remember as the most gentle soul in the world, but your brothers I am afraid are not...but I am being uncharitable, Lambie, and that is the worst of all the sins. At any rate I think you will go back to England not ill-equipped for your struggle."

A troubled look came to the girl's face, but it passed.

"You've been a mother to me, Madame," she said quietly. "I shall go into the world without fear."

"I think you will hold your own, my dear," said the Mother Superior, and stooped to kiss the kneeling girl, "even with your brothers. By the way, do they know that word?"

Lambie on her way to the door turned.

"Which word, Reverend Mother?" she asked.

"Bing," said the Mother Superior, and shook a reproving finger before a face which was anything but reproving.

IT IS POSSIBLE that the Reverend Mother knew more of the Laudermere family than did Lambie, for there was a time when Paul Laudermere had been attaché at the British Embassy in Paris, and the Comtesse, as she was then, knew everybody, and her knowledge of the family she had gained partly from her own observation and partly from the little pupil whom Paul had sent to her care. She may have learnt something of them from other sources, for the world in which they lived was a very small one. Of the family she could know little that was calculated to strengthen her faith in humanity.

They robbed Paul Laudermere without shame or difficulty. Tom Laudermere, his big, ungainly, elder son, with his monocle and his pointed red beard (pride of his twenty-six years) robbed him openly; Jarnach Laudermere, his second (and younger) son, with less blatancy; Winifred, his elder daughter, married to Sir Colley Garr, was as calm a robber, and had the inestimable advantage of being assisted by Colley, who had lived by his wits all his life.

Each and every one of them had an euphemism for his or her depredations. Tom called his "finance." Jarnach spoke vaguely of "backing."

Winifred's was thinly disguised as borrowing, but the result was mainly the same. Father Paul Laudermere, big and hearty, bearded brownly to the third button of his waistcoat, would be approached in the garden, hose in hand, and the end of strenuous tale-telling would be a "Certainly, certainly, my boy" (or "my girl," as the case might be), "You'll find my cheque-book under *The Times*— fill in the amount and leave it for me to sign."

Old Paul (he wasn't so old either) had been married at twenty, had lived seven unhappy years with a lady possessed of a temperament, who had presented him with three children and an accumulation of dressmakers' bills dating back to the days of her girlhood, had prevailed upon him to invest twenty thousand pounds in her brothers' cycle manufactory, nagged him daily for the greater part of those seven years, and had then died.

He married again, choosing a lady who presented him with a baby girl ere she also cried "*Vale!*" to a world which had interested her in the odd moments when she had been free from a gripping pain at her heart.

Thus ended Paul Laudermere's matrimonial ventures.

He superintended, or thought he superintended, the education of his children, cultivated a new variety of pansy, and wrote long letters to *The Times* on the necessity for introducing legislation to check the ravages of bee disease— for he was an enthusiastic apiarist. He had a large house and a considerable estate in Kent between Sevenoaks and Tonbridge, and at one time an income of £20,000 a year in gilt edge five per cent. stocks. He had sold some £30,000 worth of these to invest in Jarnach's motor works at Coventry, had dropped £40,000 in a gigantic deal in cotton (on Tom's earnest assurance that cotton was going sky high), had put out £20,000 on a mortgage of Garr Court, and had loaned Winifred so many thousands that he had ceased to keep account of them.

PAUL LAUDERMERE sat in his study, a big pipe between his sound white teeth, a thoughtful look on his face. Before him was a sheet of foolscap covered with figures, a fat passbook, and a nearly-written list of his securities furnished by his bank.

The handle of the study door turned and Mr. Laudermere, in some alarm, scrambled the tell-tale evidence of his perturbation into an open drawer of his desk, and shut it quickly as Tom, his cap on the back of his head, a big cigar in his mouth, and his hands (one recently released from the fag of opening the door) thrust into his baggy breeches pocket.

"Hello, governor!" he said, and looked round the apartment, "all alone?"

"Come in, Tom, boy," said Paul uneasily.

"I wanted to see you," Tom dropped into a big chair wearily, stuck his monocle in his eye, and took a steady survey of his parent, "I'm afraid I'm going to bother you, father."

Paul stared a little pleadingly at his son.

"Going to bother me, Tom— God bless my life, you never bother me. What is it?"

Tom crossed his legs and lent forward. He spoke very soberly, and pointed his argument with emphatic jabs of his cigar.

"You've never heard of Mexican Quarries, have you? It's a company that went into liquidation some years ago. I had a few shares in it."

It was remarkable that Paul had not heard of any company which had gone into liquidation and in which his son hadn't a few shares.

"Now, sir," Tom went on impressively, "we can get this property for £60,000—"

Paul Laudermere winced.

"We need only put up £I0,000 and the rest in instalments of ten thousand each, but there will be practically no necessity to put up any more money, because the quarries will show a profit sufficient to pay the other instalments. I wanted you to come to town to-morrow to meet Lord Willus who is the trustee for the debenture holders—"

"To-morrow?" Paul Laudermere shook his head. "Lambie is coming home to- morrow, Tom—"

A look of infinite weariness came to Tom Laudermere's face.

"Lambie! My dear father! Because a little schoolgirl is coming back from a convent, you're not going to allow a deal like this to fall through? Not that it is necessary that you should see Willus at all— I can fix everything. But apart from that, I wanted you to come to town to see that new car I spoke to you about."

But Paul shook his head, firm on this point. His baby was a very important person. He was unnecessarily in terror lest her half-brothers and sister should discover this, and his attitude toward the shy little schoolgirl who came home for her holidays to Hilltop Manor had been one of gruff and unyielding sternness. This was when other members of the family were present.

"No," he said. "I must be at home to meet Lambie.... I want to see her about her affairs.... Her dear mother left her a little, you know," he said hurriedly and apologetically.

Tom pursed his lips in thought.

Once before he had opposed his father in the matter of Lambie, and had been shocked by encountering a steely firmness which had not endeared his

half- sister to him or, as it happened, to his nearer relatives, since in this matter of Lambie, Tom, Jarnach, and Winifred were one.

"I'll try to fix another day," he said, rising, "but I can take it that you are keen on the scheme—"

"Not keen," murmured his father, "the fact is, my boy, I've had rather an unpleasant letter from my bank manager.... I suppose we couldn't realise anything on Torson's?"

"Torson's are in liquidation, father," said Tom irritably. "I thought I explained that to you very fully; it will be a long time before they realise their assets."

"Or those Brebner shares?" suggested Paul in his mild way. "I had hopes of Brebners; you said— "

"Now don't reproach me about Brebners," said Tom, obviously hurt. "We couldn't foresee that they'd lose the government contract."

Mr. Laudermere sighed, and Tom went out of the room, swearing softly.

Down below in the big room which Jarnach had appropriated as a study, the remainder of the family was assembled.

Winifred, a pretty peaky woman, sat on the edge of a table, smoking; Colley, her husband, a florid, young man, was gazing moodily out of the window, and Jarnach, the genius of the family, with his epigrams and his deep turned down collar, was reading with evident amusement a circular which had come by that morning's post. It was an appeal issued by the Breunit Brotherhood demanding amongst other things the supervision of religious orders and the suppression of convents. Jarnach was a "societies" man, and dabbled in church reformation and anti-vivisection movements, but the foaming and intemperate document before him demanding as it did donations to further the work of "destroying the monstrous practices of priest and bigot" left him cold. Moreover, there were more intimate and vital questions calling for his attention at the moment.

Winifred turned to her brother as he came in.

"We've got to wait Lambie's pleasure," he said.

Colley turned from the window.

"What's Lambie got to do with it?" be asked fretfully. He had a hoarse voice and lisped a little. "We can get old Willus to sell for a song, an' there's five thousand at least to split— "

"Shut up about splitting," said Tom roughly. "Any one would think we were burglars to hear you talk."

"Well, ain't we?" asked Sir Colley Garr, with a laugh.

Jarnach made a little face.

"What a coarse beggar you are, Colley," he said. "Tell us some more about dear Lambie, Tom."

"She comes home to-morrow from school."

"Oh," was all that Jarnach could find to say, and allowed the conversation to drift back to money. Presently he interrupted.

"Do any of you people know the Convent of St. Maria Theressa?" he asked.

"Why?" Winifred looked over to him, her delicate eyebrows raised.

"Oh, nothing," said Jarnach carelessly, "only I thought I heard you referring to Lambie just now as a little fool."

"That was me," admitted Winnie, with a slow smile. "Has the Convent of St. Maria Theressa any especial qualities for teaching wisdom to the young?"

"Yes," said Jarnach surprisingly.

He was a good-looking young man, clean-shaven and wholesome, though he wore his hair a thought too long, and he loved creating sensations.

"The Mother Superior of St. Theressa is Sister Agatha," he said profoundly, and ignoring the ironical expressions of surprise, he went on, "Sister Agatha in her secular days was Madame the Comtesse d'Avignon, the young wife of the greatest of French bankers and herself a famous society leader and wit. She took the veil on the death of her husband, and for twenty years has been teaching the young ideas."

Tom looked at him curiously.

"Whilst you're in this communicative mood," said he, with a sneer, "perhaps you'll tell us how this affects us—"

"Only this," said the other. "Lady Goreston, whose daughter is at the same convent, tells me that Lambie is a great favourite with the Mother Superior."

"You don't tell me!" said his brother sarcastically.

He got up from his chair.

"I'm going to town," he said. "I've some people coming to dinner to- night. I regret I shall not be here to welcome this paragon."

Neither Winifred nor Colley had any interest in Hilltop other than the interest which Paul Laudermere's views on Mexican Quarries aroused. This was Tuesday, they would re-assemble on the Friday. They went their several ways, and Winifred was in her house in Curzon Street before she realised that she had gone away without saying good-bye to her father.

Jarnach had promised himself the felicity of greeting the child on her return, and went to town with that idea, but spent the afternoon at his club and missed the continental train.

HE CAME DOWN to Hilltop on Friday, travelling down with Winifred and her husband. Tom had motored down.

Had Miss Mary come? She had arrived, said Penter gravely. She was in Mr. Laudermere's study— had been there all the morning.

"He'll spoil that brat," said Winifred. "Tommy, you'd better go up and see father and settle this quarry business."

"Hullo, brother Tom," said Lambie, and gave him her cheek to kiss.

She had grown, he remarked, and was already above his shoulder. She was dressed all in dove grey ("like a convent girl straight out of a musical comedy," he described her).

Her eyes were grey, merging to blue, her hair gold, going brown. She was progressive, even in her features. You saw her growing. Her nose was straight, and her mouth firm above a chin too soft and young to be firm.

She was a straight girl in the first beautiful stage of womanhood.

She had a trick of blinking when she was amazed, which, considering she had come right away from school was surprising seldom. But she was Lambie still, with her gentle, apologetic little smile, her soft, soothing voice, her flutters of embarrassment.

"You're getting a big girl," patronised Tom, patting her cheek for the last time in his life.

"Yes, brother Tom," she agreed meekly.

"You must get out of that silly habit of calling me 'Brother Tom,' " he said, "and now you can run away and see Winifred and Jarnach. You'll find 'em downstairs."

She hesitated and looked shyly at her father. Paul Laudermere sat stiffly behind his desk, stroking his beard and frowning with a ferocity which only panic can lend to an easy man.

"I think, brother Tom," said Lambie gently, "I cannot afford the time now.... You see I'm daddy's secretary."

"His what?" laughed Tom. They heard his roar of laughter down below and drew an altogether wrong conclusion.

"His secretary. Aren't I, daddy?"

Paul Laudermere nodded and rose with a jerk.

"Lambie is my secretary," he said loudly, defiantly, rapidly, and all but incoherently. "Sound business training.... Winifred's idea.... Talk things over with her, Tom.... Mexican Quarry and all that sort of thing.... I've got a headache."

He escaped from the study through the library door.

For a moment Tom stood open-mouthed, staring at the place where his father had sat, then he looked at his half-sister, prim and business-like, yet with a hint of bubbling merriment behind her eyes.

"What the dickens does he mean?" he demanded. "Talk an intricate business like Mex— it's absurd!"

She nibbled the end of a brand new pencil and eyed him thoughtfully.

"Perhaps it isn't, Brother Tom," she suggested humbly. If he had known human nature better, Brother Tom would have been very suspicious of her humility.

She seated herself, with the effrontery of ignorance (so he said afterwards) in her father's chair, and without encouragement went into the question of Mexican Quarries.

"We talked it over yesterday," she said timidly. "You see, Brother Tom, the Mother Superior, who is awfully clever about finance— she has raised the money to rebuild three convents— has given me a lot of advice, I acted as her secretary for quite a long time. Daddy says you want to buy the— what do you call them?— the debentures of Mexican Quarries?"

"My dear little girl," said Tom, in bland irritation, "what is the use of our discussing this? There are certain things one isn't taught at school—"

"Oh yes, one is," she said calmly, "I was taught the principle of good business long before I went to school, the principle, I mean, that should guide me in dealing even with Mexican Quarries."

"And may I ask," demanded the wrathful Tom, "what is that wonderful principal?"

She looked at him for a second— a keen, searching look.

"Thou shalt not steal," she said.

He sprang up from his chair as though he had been shot, his face crimson with passion.

"You...you..." he spluttered.

"Don't be angry, Brother Tom," she said, and waved him down again. To his amazement, he obeyed her gesture.

"Sixty thousand pounds I think you said," she went on. "Lord Willus, the trustee for the debenture holders, says— I have his wire."

She unlocked a drawer and took out a pink telegraph form and read:

"Have offered property to Laudermere's Syndicate for £4000. Answering your inquiry I cannot honestly say that the property is even worth that."

There was a dead silence.

Tom's face went from crimson to white.

"You see," she went on apologetically, "I know Lord Willus's daughter, and he's by way of being a pal of mine"— Tom gasped— "so I wired him. Don't you think, Brother Tom, that the Laudermere Syndicate is asking rather a big profit?"

"Does father know this?" he demanded huskily.

"Not yet," she said softly, "but I've told my own lawyer by 'phone. You see, Brother Tom, I had to have lawyers because dear daddy doesn't seem to have any, and there are so many things that require straightening out. All those funny investments that he has shares in. You know them, don't you?"

"WELL?"

The Laudermere Syndicate put the question collectively, and Tom answered in two sentences.

He added a comprehensive conspectus of the situation and the family listened.

"I'll see her," said Winifred, and came marching into the study just as Lambie was locking away a big envelope in Paul Laudermere's safe.

"What is this nonsense you have been talking to Tom?" she demanded without preliminary.

"Nonsense, Sister Winifred?" asked Lambie, big-eyed with wonder.

"Don't call me 'Sister Winifred.' Please drop your convent tricks," snapped Winnie. "If you think you're coming to Hilltop to set our father against us—"

Lambie, both hands on the edge of the desk, leant forward.

"I think we will leave your father out of the question," she said briskly, "and we will come right down to a sum of £20,000 in second mortgage on Garr Court— the existence of a first mortgage not having been disclosed."

Here was a thunderbolt for Winifred— all that she had ever dreaded had happened at last.

"I shall... speak to father," she whimpered.

"In which case," said Lambie, "I shall dump the whole of the facts into the hands of my lawyers! Now run away and tell Jarnach I want to see him."

What she said to Jarnach no man knows, but he came back to an animated and angry family circle with an air of preoccupation.

"What did she say?"

He shook his head.

"Nothing much," said he.

He walked to his desk and began rummaging amongst his papers.

"I want to find the address of those people who wish to suppress convents," he said good-humouredly. "I should like to send them a subscription. And, by the way," he turned, "whose idea was it to give Lambie a business training?"

Winifred Laudermere might have claimed the honour had she been capable of speech.

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7: The Magic Shop

H. G. Wells

1866-1946

The Strand Magazine June 1903

I HAD SEEN THE Magic Shop from afar several times; I had passed it once or twice, a shop window of alluring little objects, magic balls, magic hens, wonderful cones, ventriloquist dolls, the material of the basket trick, packs of cards that *looked* all right, and all that sort of thing, but never had I thought of going in until one day, almost without warning, Gip hauled me by my finger right up to the window, and so conducted himself that there was nothing for it but to take him in. I had not thought the place was there, to tell the truth— a modest-sized frontage in Regent Street, between the picture shop and the place where the chicks run about just out of patent incubators, but there it was sure enough. I had fancied it was down nearer the Circus, or round the corner in Oxford Street, or even in Holborn; always over the way and a little inaccessible it had been, with something of the mirage in its position; but here it was now quite indisputably, and the fat end of Gip's pointing finger made a noise upon the glass.

"If I was rich," said Gip, dabbing a finger at the Disappearing Egg, "I'd buy myself that. And that"— which was The Crying Baby, Very Human—"and that," which was a mystery, and called, so a neat card asserted, "Buy One and Astonish Your Friends."

"Anything," said Gip, "will disappear under one of those cones. I have read about it in a book.

"And there, dadda, is the Vanishing Halfpenny—, only they've put it this way up so's we can't see how it's done."

Gip, dear boy, inherits his mother's breeding, and he did not propose to enter the shop or worry in any way; only, you know, quite unconsciously he lugged my finger doorward, and he made his interest clear.

"That," he said, and pointed to the Magic Bottle.

"If you had that?" I said; at which promising inquiry he looked up with a sudden radiance.

"I could show it to Jessie," he said, thoughtful as ever of others.

"It's less than a hundred days to your birthday, Gibbles," I said, and laid my hand on the door-handle.

Gip made no answer, but his grip tightened on my finger, and so we came into the shop.

It was no common shop this; it was a magic shop, and all the prancing precedence Gip would have taken in the matter of mere toys was wanting. He left the burthen of the conversation to me.

It was a little, narrow shop, not very well lit, and the door-bell pinged again with a plaintive note as we closed it behind us. For a moment or so we were alone and could glance about us. There was a tiger in papier-mache on the glass case that covered the low counter— a grave, kind-eyed tiger that waggled his head in a methodical manner; there were several crystal spheres, a china hand holding magic cards, a stock of magic fish-bowls in various sizes, and an immodest magic hat that shamelessly displayed its springs. On the floor were magic mirrors; one to draw you out long and thin, one to swell your head and vanish your legs, and one to make you short and fat like a draught; and while we were laughing at these the shopman, as I suppose, came in.

At any rate, there he was behind the counter— a curious, sallow, dark man, with one ear larger than the other and a chin like the toe-cap of a boot.

"What can we have the pleasure?" he said, spreading his long, magic fingers on the glass case; and so with a start we were aware of him.

"I want," I said, "to buy my little boy a few simple tricks."

"Legerdemain?" he asked. "Mechanical? Domestic?"

"Anything amusing?" said I.

"Um!" said the shopman, and scratched his head for a moment as if thinking. Then, quite distinctly, he drew from his head a glass ball. "Something in this way?" he said, and held it out.

The action was unexpected. I had seen the trick done at entertainments endless times before— it's part of the common stock of conjurers— but I had not expected it here.

"That's good," I said, with a laugh.

"Isn't it?" said the shopman.

Gip stretched out his disengaged hand to take this object and found merely a blank palm.

"It's in your pocket," said the shopman, and there it was!

"How much will that be?" I asked.

"We make no charge for glass balls," said the shopman politely. "We get them,"— he picked one out of his elbow as he spoke—"free." He produced another from the back of his neck, and laid it beside its predecessor on the counter. Gip regarded his glass ball sagely, then directed a look of inquiry at the two on the counter, and finally brought his round-eyed scrutiny to the shopman, who smiled.

"You may have those too," said the shopman, "and, if you *don't* mind, one from my mouth. *So*!"

Gip counselled me mutely for a moment, and then in a profound silence put away the four balls, resumed my reassuring finger, and nerved himself for the next event.

"We get all our smaller tricks in that way," the shopman remarked.

I laughed in the manner of one who subscribes to a jest. "Instead of going to the wholesale shop," I said. "Of course, it's cheaper."

"In a way," the shopman said. "Though we pay in the end. But not so heavily— as people suppose.... Our larger tricks, and our daily provisions and all the other things we want, we get out of that hat... And you know, sir, if you'll excuse my saying it, there *isn't* a wholesale shop, not for Genuine Magic goods, sir. I don't know if you noticed our inscription— the Genuine Magic shop." He drew a business-card from his cheek and handed it to me. "Genuine," he said, with his finger on the word, and added, "There is absolutely no deception, sir."

He seemed to be carrying out the joke pretty thoroughly, I thought.

He turned to Gip with a smile of remarkable affability. "You, you know, are the Right Sort of Boy."

I was surprised at his knowing that, because, in the interests of discipline, we keep it rather a secret even at home; but Gip received it in unflinching silence, keeping a steadfast eye on him.

"It's only the Right Sort of Boy gets through that doorway."

And, as if by way of illustration, there came a rattling at the door, and a squeaking little voice could be faintly heard. "Nyar! I *warn* 'a go in there, dadda, I *warn* 'a go in there. Ny-a-a-ah!" and then the accents of a down-trodden parent, urging consolations and propitiations. "It's locked, Edward," he said.

"But it isn't," said I.

"It is, sir," said the shopman, "always— for that sort of child," and as he spoke we had a glimpse of the other youngster, a little, white face, pallid from sweet-eating and over-sapid food, and distorted by evil passions, a ruthless little egotist, pawing at the enchanted pane. "It's no good, sir," said the shopman, as I moved, with my natural helpfulness, doorward, and presently the spoilt child was carried off howling.

"How do you manage that?" I said, breathing a little more freely.

"Magic!" said the shopman, with a careless wave of the hand, and behold! sparks of coloured fire flew out of his fingers and vanished into the shadows of the shop.

"You were saying," he said, addressing himself to Gip, "before you came in, that you would like one of our 'Buy One and Astonish your Friends' boxes?"

Gip, after a gallant effort, said "Yes."

"It's in your pocket."

And leaning over the counter— he really had an extraordinarily long body— this amazing person produced the article in the customary conjurer's

manner. "Paper," he said, and took a sheet out of the empty hat with the springs; "string," and behold his mouth was a string-box, from which he drew an unending thread, which when he had tied his parcel he bit off— and, it seemed to me, swallowed the ball of string. And then he lit a candle at the nose of one of the ventriloquist's dummies, stuck one of his fingers (which had become sealing-wax red) into the flame, and so sealed the parcel. "Then there was the Disappearing Egg," he remarked, and produced one from within my coat-breast and packed it, and also The Crying Baby, Very Human. I handed each parcel to Gip as it was ready, and he clasped them to his chest.

He said very little, but his eyes were eloquent; the clutch of his arms was eloquent. He was the playground of unspeakable emotions. These, you know, were *real* Magics. Then, with a start, I discovered something moving about in my hat— something soft and jumpy. I whipped it off, and a ruffled pigeon— no doubt a confederate— dropped out and ran on the counter, and went, I fancy, into a cardboard box behind the papier-mache tiger.

"Tut, tut!" said the shopman, dexterously relieving me of my headdress; "careless bird, and— as I live— nesting!"

He shook my hat, and shook out into his extended hand two or three eggs, a large marble, a watch, about half-a-dozen of the inevitable glass balls, and then crumpled, crinkled paper, more and more and more, talking all the time of the way in which people neglect to brush their hats *inside* as well as out, politely, of course, but with a certain personal application. "All sorts of things accumulate, sir.... Not *you*, of course, in particular.... Nearly every customer.... Astonishing what they carry about with them...." The crumpled paper rose and billowed on the counter more and more and more, until he was nearly hidden from us, until he was altogether hidden, and still his voice went on and on. "We none of us know what the fair semblance of a human being may conceal, sir. Are we all then no better than brushed exteriors, whited sepulchres—"

His voice stopped— exactly like when you hit a neighbour's gramophone with a well-aimed brick, the same instant silence, and the rustle of the paper stopped, and everything was still....

"Have you done with my hat?" I said, after an interval.

There was no answer.

I stared at Gip, and Gip stared at me, and there were our distortions in the magic mirrors, looking very rum, and grave, and quiet....

"I think we'll go now," I said. "Will you tell me how much all this comes to?....

"I say," I said, on a rather louder note, "I want the bill; and my hat, please."

It might have been a sniff from behind the paper pile....

"Let's look behind the counter, Gip," I said. "He's making fun of us."

I led Gip round the head-wagging tiger, and what do you think there was behind the counter? No one at all! Only my hat on the floor, and a common conjurer's lop-eared white rabbit lost in meditation, and looking as stupid and crumpled as only a conjurer's rabbit can do. I resumed my hat, and the rabbit lolloped a lollop or so out of my way.

"Dadda!" said Gip, in a guilty whisper.

"What is it, Gip?" said I.

"I *do* like this shop, dadda."

"So should I," I said to myself, "if the counter wouldn't suddenly extend itself to shut one off from the door." But I didn't call Gip's attention to that. "Pussy!" he said, with a hand out to the rabbit as it came lolloping past us; "Pussy, do Gip a magic!" and his eyes followed it as it squeezed through a door I had certainly not remarked a moment before. Then this door opened wider, and the man with one ear larger than the other appeared again. He was smiling still, but his eye met mine with something between amusement and defiance. "You'd like to see our show-room, sir," he said, with an innocent suavity. Gip tugged my finger forward. I glanced at the counter and met the shopman's eye again. I was beginning to think the magic just a little too genuine. "We haven't *very* much time," I said. But somehow we were inside the show-room before I could finish that.

"All goods of the same quality," said the shopman, rubbing his flexible hands together, "and that is the Best. Nothing in the place that isn't genuine Magic, and warranted thoroughly rum. Excuse me, sir!"

I felt him pull at something that clung to my coat-sleeve, and then I saw he held a little, wriggling red demon by the tail— the little creature bit and fought and tried to get at his hand— and in a moment he tossed it carelessly behind a counter. No doubt the thing was only an image of twisted indiarubber, but for the moment—! And his gesture was exactly that of a man who handles some petty biting bit of vermin. I glanced at Gip, but Gip was looking at a magic rocking-horse. I was glad he hadn't seen the thing. "I say," I said, in an undertone, and indicating Gip and the red demon with my eyes, "you haven't many things like *that* about, have you?"

"None of ours! Probably brought it with you," said the shopman— also in an undertone, and with a more dazzling smile than ever. "Astonishing what people *will* carry about with them unawares!" And then to Gip, "Do you see anything you fancy here?"

There were many things that Gip fancied there.

He turned to this astonishing tradesman with mingled confidence and respect. "Is that a Magic Sword?" he said.

"A Magic Toy Sword. It neither bends, breaks, nor cuts the fingers. It renders the bearer invincible in battle against any one under eighteen. Half-a-crown to seven and sixpence, according to size. These panoplies on cards are for juvenile knights-errant and very useful— shield of safety, sandals of swiftness, helmet of invisibility."

"Oh, daddy!" gasped Gip.

I tried to find out what they cost, but the shopman did not heed me. He had got Gip now; he had got him away from my finger; he had embarked upon the exposition of all his confounded stock, and nothing was going to stop him. Presently I saw with a qualm of distrust and something very like jealousy that Gip had hold of this person's finger as usually he has hold of mine. No doubt the fellow was interesting, I thought, and had an interestingly faked lot of stuff, really *good* faked stuff, still—

I wandered after them, saying very little, but keeping an eye on this prestidigital fellow. After all, Gip was enjoying it. And no doubt when the time came to go we should be able to go quite easily.

It was a long, rambling place, that show-room, a gallery broken up by stands and stalls and pillars, with archways leading off to other departments, in which the queerest-looking assistants loafed and stared at one, and with perplexing mirrors and curtains. So perplexing, indeed, were these that I was presently unable to make out the door by which we had come.

The shopman showed Gip magic trains that ran without steam or clockwork, just as you set the signals, and then some very, very valuable boxes of soldiers that all came alive directly you took off the lid and said— . I myself haven't a very quick ear and it was a tongue-twisting sound, but Gip— he has his mother's ear— got it in no time. "Bravo!" said the shopman, putting the men back into the box unceremoniously and handing it to Gip. "Now," said the shopman, and in a moment Gip had made them all alive again.

"You'll take that box?" asked the shopman.

"We'll take that box," said I, "unless you charge its full value. In which case it would need a Trust Magnate—"

"Dear heart! *No*!" and the shopman swept the little men back again, shut the lid, waved the box in the air, and there it was, in brown paper, tied up and— *with Gip's full name and address on the paper*!

The shopman laughed at my amazement.

"This is the genuine magic," he said. "The real thing."

"It's a little too genuine for my taste," I said again.

After that he fell to showing Gip tricks, odd tricks, and still odder the way they were done. He explained them, he turned them inside out, and there was the dear little chap nodding his busy bit of a head in the sagest manner.

I did not attend as well as I might. "Hey, presto!" said the Magic Shopman, and then would come the clear, small "Hey, presto!" of the boy. But I was distracted by other things. It was being borne in upon me just how tremendously rum this place was; it was, so to speak, inundated by a sense of rumness. There was something a little rum about the fixtures even, about the ceiling, about the floor, about the casually distributed chairs. I had a queer feeling that whenever I wasn't looking at them straight they went askew, and moved about, and played a noiseless puss-in-the-corner behind my back. And the cornice had a serpentine design with masks— masks altogether too expressive for proper plaster.

Then abruptly my attention was caught by one of the odd-looking assistants. He was some way off and evidently unaware of my presence— I saw a sort of three-quarter length of him over a pile of toys and through an arch— and, you know, he was leaning against a pillar in an idle sort of way doing the most horrid things with his features! The particular horrid thing he did was with his nose. He did it just as though he was idle and wanted to amuse himself. First of all it was a short, blobby nose, and then suddenly he shot it out like a telescope, and then out it flew and became thinner and thinner until it was like a long, red, flexible whip. Like a thing in a nightmare it was! He flourished it about and flung it forth as a fly-fisher flings his line.

My instant thought was that Gip mustn't see him. I turned about, and there was Gip quite preoccupied with the shopman, and thinking no evil. They were whispering together and looking at me. Gip was standing on a little stool, and the shopman was holding a sort of big drum in his hand.

"Hide and seek, dadda!" cried Gip. "You're He!"

And before I could do anything to prevent it, the shopman had clapped the big drum over him. I saw what was up directly. "Take that off," I cried, "this instant! You'll frighten the boy. Take it off!"

The shopman with the unequal ears did so without a word, and held the big cylinder towards me to show its emptiness. And the little stool was vacant! In that instant my boy had utterly disappeared?...

You know, perhaps, that sinister something that comes like a hand out of the unseen and grips your heart about. You know it takes your common self away and leaves you tense and deliberate, neither slow nor hasty, neither angry nor afraid. So it was with me.

I came up to this grinning shopman and kicked his stool aside.

"Stop this folly!" I said. "Where is my boy?"

"You see," he said, still displaying the drum's interior, "there is no deception—"

I put out my hand to grip him, and he eluded me by a dexterous movement. I snatched again, and he turned from me and pushed open a door to escape. "Stop!" I said, and he laughed, receding. I leapt after him— into utter darkness.

Thud!

"Lor' bless my 'eart! I didn't see you coming, sir!"

I was in Regent Street, and I had collided with a decent-looking working man; and a yard away, perhaps, and looking a little perplexed with himself, was Gip. There was some sort of apology, and then Gip had turned and come to me with a bright little smile, as though for a moment he had missed me.

And he was carrying four parcels in his arm!

He secured immediate possession of my finger.

For the second I was rather at a loss. I stared round to see the door of the magic shop, and, behold, it was not there! There was no door, no shop, nothing, only the common pilaster between the shop where they sell pictures and the window with the chicks!...

I did the only thing possible in that mental tumult; I walked straight to the kerbstone and held up my umbrella for a cab.

" 'Ansoms," said Gip, in a note of culminating exultation.

I helped him in, recalled my address with an effort, and got in also. Something unusual proclaimed itself in my tail-coat pocket, and I felt and discovered a glass ball. With a petulant expression I flung it into the street.

Gip said nothing.

For a space neither of us spoke.

"Dada!" said Gip, at last, "that *was* a proper shop!"

I came round with that to the problem of just how the whole thing had seemed to him. He looked completely undamaged— so far, good; he was neither scared nor unhinged, he was simply tremendously satisfied with the afternoon's entertainment, and there in his arms were the four parcels.

Confound it! what could be in them?

"Um!" I said. "Little boys can't go to shops like that every day."

He received this with his usual stoicism, and for a moment I was sorry I was his father and not his mother, and so couldn't suddenly there, coram publico, in our hansom, kiss him. After all, I thought, the thing wasn't so very bad.

But it was only when we opened the parcels that I really began to be reassured. Three of them contained boxes of soldiers, quite ordinary lead soldiers, but of so good a quality as to make Gip altogether forget that originally these parcels had been Magic Tricks of the only genuine sort, and the fourth contained a kitten, a little living white kitten, in excellent health and appetite and temper.

I saw this unpacking with a sort of provisional relief. I hung about in the nursery for quite an unconscionable time....

THAT happened six months ago. And now I am beginning to believe it is all right. The kitten had only the magic natural to all kittens, and the soldiers seem as steady a company as any colonel could desire. And Gip—?

The intelligent parent will understand that I have to go cautiously with Gip.

But I went so far as this one day. I said, "How would you like your soldiers to come alive, Gip, and march about by themselves?"

"Mine do," said Gip. "I just have to say a word I know before I open the lid."

"Then they march about alone?"

"Oh, *quite*, dadda. I shouldn't like them if they didn't do that."

I displayed no unbecoming surprise, and since then I have taken occasion to drop in upon him once or twice, unannounced, when the soldiers were about, but so far I have never discovered them performing in anything like a magical manner.

It's so difficult to tell.

There's also a question of finance. I have an incurable habit of paying bills. I have been up and down Regent Street several times, looking for that shop. I am inclined to think, indeed, that in that matter honour is satisfied, and that, since Gip's name and address are known to them, I may very well leave it to these people, whoever they may be, to send in their bill in their own time.

———————

8: At the Dip of the Road

Mrs Molesworth

(Mary Louisa Molesworth, 1839-1921)

Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper, Jan 1895

HAVE I ever seen a ghost?

I do not know.

That is the only reply I can truthfully make to the question now-a-days so often asked. And sometimes, if inquirers care to hear more, I go on to tell them the one experience which makes it impossible for me to reply positively either in the affirmative or negative, and restricts me to "I do not know".

This was the story.

I was staying with relations in the country. Not a very isolated or out-of-the-way part of the world, and yet rather inconvenient of access by the railway. For the nearest station was six miles off. Though the family I was visiting were nearly connected with me I did not know much of their home or its neighbourhood, as the head of the house, an uncle of mine by marriage, had only come into the property a year or two previously to the date of which I am writing, through the death of an elder brother.

It was a nice place. A good comfortable old house, a prosperous, satisfactory estate. Everything about it was in good order, from the farmers, who always paid their rents, to the shooting, which was always good; from the vineries, which were noted, to the woods, where the earliest primroses in all the country side were yearly to be found.

And my uncle and aunt and their family deserved these pleasant things and made a good use of them.

But there was a touch of the commonplace about it all. There was nothing picturesque or romantic. The country was flat though fertile, the house, though old, was conveniently modern in its arrangements, airy, cheery, and bright.

"Not even a ghost, or the shadow of one," I remember saying one day with a faint grumble.

"Ah, well— as to that," said my uncle, "perhaps we—" but just then something interrupted him, and I forgot his unfinished speech.

Into the happy party of which for the time being I was one, there fell one morning a sudden thunderbolt of calamity. The post brought news of the alarming illness of the eldest daughter—Frances, married a year or two ago and living, as the crow flies, at no very great distance. But as the crow flies is not always as the railroad runs, and to reach the Aldoyns' home from Fawne Court, my uncle's place, was a complicated business— it was scarcely possible to go and return in a day.

"Can one of you come over?" wrote the young husband. "She is already out of danger, but longing to see her mother or one of you. She is worrying about the baby"— a child of a few months old— "and wishing for nurse."

We looked at each other.

"Nurse must go at once," said my uncle to me, as the eldest of the party. Perhaps I should here say that I am a widow, though not old, and with no close ties or responsibilities. "But for your aunt it is impossible."

"Quite so," I agreed. For she was at the moment painfully lamed by rheumatism.

"And the other girls are almost too young at such a crisis," my uncle continued. "Would you, Charlotte—" and he hesitated. "It would be such a comfort to have personal news of her."

"Of course I will go," I said. "Nurse and I can start at once. I will leave her there, and return alone, to give you, I have no doubt, better news of poor Francie."

He was full of gratitude. So were they all.

"Don't hurry back to-night," said my uncle. "Stay till— till Monday if you like." But I could not promise. I knew they would be glad of news at once, and in a small house like my cousin's, at such a time, an inmate the more might be inconvenient.

"I will try to return to-night," I said. And as I sprang into the carriage I added: "Send to Moore to meet the last train, unless I telegraph to the contrary."

My uncle nodded; the boys called after me, "All right;" the old butler bowed assent, and I was satisfied.

Nurse and I reached our journey's end promptly, considering the four or five junctions at which we had to change carriages. But on the whole "going," the trains fitted astonishingly.

We found Frances better, delighted to see us, eager for news of her mother, and, finally, disposed to sleep peacefully now that she knew that there was an experienced person in charge. And both she and her husband thanked me so much that I felt ashamed of the little I had done. Mr. Aldoyn begged me to stay till Monday; but the house was upset, and I was eager to carry back my good tidings.

"They are meeting me at Moore by the last train," I said. "No, thank you, I think it is best to go."

"You will have an uncomfortable journey," he replied. "It is Saturday, and the trains will be late, and the stations crowded with the market people. It will be horrid for you, Charlotte."

But I persisted.

It *was* rather horrid. And it was queer. There was a sort of uncanny eeriness about that Saturday evening's journey that I have never forgotten. The season was very early spring. It was not very cold, but chilly and ungenial. And there were such odd sorts of people about. I travelled second-class; for I am not rich, and I am very independent. I did not want my uncle to pay my fare, for I liked the feeling of rendering him some small service in return for his steady kindness to me. The first stage of my journey was performed in the company of two old naturalists travelling to Scotland to look for some small plant which was to be found only in one spot in the Highlands. This I gathered from their talk to each other. You never saw two such extraordinary creatures as they were. They both wore black kid gloves much too large for them, and the ends of the fingers waved about like feathers.

Then followed two or three short transits, interspersed with weary waitings at stations. The last of these was the worst, and tantalising, too, for by this time I was within a few miles of Moore. The station was crowded with rough folk, all, it seemed to me, more or less tipsy. So I took refuge in a dark waiting-room on the small side line by which I was to proceed, where I felt I might have been robbed and murdered and no one the wiser.

But at last came my slow little train, and in I jumped, to jump out again still more joyfully some fifteen minutes later when we drew up at Moore.

I peered about for the carriage. It was not to be seen; only two or three tax-carts or dog-carts, farmers' vehicles, standing about, while their owners, it was easy to hear, were drinking far more than was good for them in the taproom of the Unicorn. Thence, nevertheless— not to the taproom, but to the front of the inn— I made my way, though not undismayed by the shouts and roars breaking the stillness of the quiet night. "Was the Fawne Court carriage not here?" I asked.

The landlady was a good-natured woman, especially civil to any member of the "Court" family. But she shook her head.

"No, no carriage had been down to-day. There must have been some mistake."

There was nothing for it but to wait till she could somehow or other disinter a fly and a horse, and, worst of all a driver. For the "men" she had to call were all rather— "well, ma'am, you see it's Saturday night. We weren't expecting any one."

And when, after waiting half an hour, the fly at last emerged, my heart almost failed me. Even before he drove out of the yard, it was very plain that if ever we reached Fawne Court alive, it would certainly be more thanks to good luck than to the driver's management.

But the horse was old and the man had a sort of instinct about him. We got on all right till we were more than half way to our journey's end. The road was straight and the moonlight bright, especially after we had passed a certain corner, and got well out of the shade of the trees which skirted the first part of the way.

Just past this turn there came a dip in the road. It went down, down gradually, for a quarter of a mile or more, and I looked up anxiously, fearful of the horse taking advantage of the slope. But no, he jogged on, if possible more slowly than before, though new terrors assailed me when I saw that the driver was now fast asleep, his head swaying from side to side with extraordinary regularity. After a bit I grew easier again; he seemed to keep his equilibrium, and I looked out at the side window on the moon-flooded landscape, with some interest. I had never seen brighter moonlight.

Suddenly from out of the intense stillness and loneliness a figure, a human figure, became visible. It was that of a man, a young and active man, running along the footpath a few feet to our left, apparently from some whim, keeping pace with the fly. My first feeling was of satisfaction that I was no longer alone, at the tender mercies of my stupefied charioteer. But, as I gazed, a slight misgiving came over me. Who could it be running along this lonely road so late, and what was his motive in keeping up with us so steadily. It almost seemed as if he had been waiting for us, yet that, of course, was impossible. He was not very highwayman-like certainly; he was well-dressed— neatly-dressed that is to say, like a superior gamekeeper— his figure was remarkably good, tall and slight, and he ran gracefully. But there was something queer about him, and suddenly the curiosity that had mingled in my observation of him was entirely submerged in alarm, when I saw that, as he ran, he was slowly but steadily drawing nearer and nearer to the fly.

"In another moment he will be opening the door and jumping in," I thought, and I glanced before me only to see that the driver was more hopelessly asleep than before; there was no chance of his hearing if I called out. And get out I could not without attracting the strange runner's attention, for as ill-luck would have it, the window was drawn up on the right side, and I could not open the door without rattling the glass. While, worse and worse, the left hand window was down! Even that slight protection wanting!

I looked out once more. By this time the figure was close, close to the fly. Then an arm was stretched out and laid along the edge of the door, as if preparatory to opening it, and then, for the first time I saw his face. It was a young face, but terribly, horribly pale and ghastly, and the eyes— all was so visible in the moonlight— had an expression such as I had never seen before or

since. It terrified me, though afterwards on recalling it, it seemed to me that it might have been more a look of agonised appeal than of menace of any kind.

I cowered back into my corner and shut my eyes, feigning sleep. It was the only idea that occurred to me. My heart was beating like a sledge hammer. All sorts of thoughts rushed through me; among them I remember saying to myself: "He must be an escaped lunatic— his eyes are so awfully wild".

How long I sat thus I don't know— whenever I dared to glance out furtively he was still there. But all at once a strange feeling of relief came over me. I sat up— yes, he was gone! And though, as I took courage, I leant out and looked round in every direction, not a trace of him was to be seen, though the road and the fields were bare and clear for a long distance round.

When I got to Fawne Court I had to wake the lodge-keeper— every one was asleep. But my uncle was still up, though not expecting me, and very distressed he was at the mistake about the carriage.

"However," he concluded, "all's well that ends well. It's delightful to have your good news. But you look sadly pale and tired, Charlotte."

Then I told him of my fright— it seemed now so foolish of me, I said. But my uncle did not smile— on the contrary.

"My dear," he said. "It sounds very like our ghost, though, of course, it may have been only one of the keepers."

He told me the story. Many years ago in his grandfather's time, a young and favourite gamekeeper had been found dead in a field skirting the road down there. There was no sign of violence upon the body; it was never explained what had killed him. But he had had in his charge a watch— a very valuable one— which his master for some reason or other had handed to him to take home to the house, not wishing to keep it on him. And when the body was found late that night, the watch was not on it. Since then, so the story goes, on a moonlight night the spirit of the poor fellow haunts the spot. It is supposed that he wants to tell what had become of his master's watch, which was never found. But no one has ever had courage to address him.

"He never comes farther than the dip in the road," said my uncle. "If you had spoken to him, Charlotte, I wonder if he would have told you his secret?"

He spoke half laughingly, but I have never quite forgiven myself for my cowardice. It was the look in those eyes!

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9: "Beverley"

Capel Boake

(Doris Boake Kerr, 1889-1944)

Weekly Times (Vic.), 2 Oct 1926

First of two quite different stories by this Australian woman author. Romance and, well...

LORNA MANSELL'S life was bounded by the four walls of Smith's Emporium. It swallowed her up every morning at nine o'clock and discharged her again at six, a pale little thing with brilliant dark eyes, a mass of shining black hair, and lips almost scarlet against the pallor of her small oval face.

But she was happy, even though Smith's Emporium made up her world. She stood behind the counter all day, the ribbons heaped up before her in great piles of color — burning scarlets and blues and vivid greens like tropical countries flaming beneath the sun; pastel shades... yellow, pale as primroses glimmering at dusk in a little lost wood... faint green of the twilight sky... pinks, soft and delicate as the first flush of the almond trees in the spring— her dark eyes smiling and a little remote, as though amid that moving mass of people, above the incessant banging of the lift doors and the high strident voices, she heard and saw something unseen.

So complete was her detachment from the life about her, so perfectly poised, that she could perform her duties with a smiling mechanism that hardly disturbed the balance of her thoughts— "Two and a half yards at 1/11. Sign please!"— while her mind wandered undisturbed in cool, quiet places, happy in her dream. The others fretted for the coming of six o'clock, eager to leave Smith's Emporium behind them, but she went slowly— and reluctantly.

Home to her was a place of jangled nerves; a dingy little house in a narrow street, filled to overflowing with quarrelsome children, a nagging stepmother, and a pale, harassed, overdriven father. There she touched reality, and her mind, struggling passionately against it, could not release itself. The dream that came so easily at Smith's evaded her at home.

She hardy knew when it had first dawned on her consciousness. Her mind, reacting against her environment, had created it almost automatically, but while at first it had been merely a faint shadow on the edge of her thoughts, a piece of make-believe which she could banish at will, now it was real, so real that it needed no effort to see it; it came itself and stayed.

"Beverley" she had called it, and the name was written in shining letters on the gate. When one came to it at dusk, toiling up the road that ran twisting and turning down hill till it lost itself among the trees— the white, white road that one could follow for miles threading its way through the dark, silent, secret bush— its tiny latticed windows shone out a friendly welcome, and in winter or

autumn, when the leaves were falling in the orchards and the air was full of the scent of burning-off, the smoke rising from its tiny red chimneys seemed to go straight up to heaven like an altar fire to God. She liked best to come on it then, for she loved the veiled light of the dusk, though she loved, too, the crystal clear mornings at "Beverley" when the soft gracious curves of the Dandenongs were of so pale, so exquisite a blue that she hardly dared to gaze on them for fear that they might melt quite away.

But "Beverley" was erratic. It came as it wished, and she could not control it. From dusk it might pass to the languid hush of noon, seeming then a little withdrawn from her, its windows shuttered and the blinds down, its flowers drooping in the heat. The shopwalker, passing between the counters, his eyes alert for the least sign of inattention, had no fault to find with her. He was not to know that while her hands were busy with the ribbons, winding and unwinding, measuring, pinning, her mind was miles away, wandering through the rooms at "Beverley," arranging and rearranging them to her taste... a gay cushion on the divan beneath the window in her sitting-room with its dark panelled walls... blue and white china canisters on the shelf of her little white kitchen....

The girls she worked with, though they liked her well enough, laughed at her a little because she so obviously shrank from their rather boisterous pleasures, but some of the more imaginative among them, intrigued by her strange, elusive charm, admired her intensely. Seeking a reason, they decided she was a Spanish type.

"There must be Spanish blood in your family, Lorna." She smiled, vaguely pleased, though, having seen "Carmen" and "The Maid of the Mountains," she knew there was no affinity between herself and those wild, tempestuous creatures who thought the world well lost for love. Never, she thought, never could she love any man as she loved "Beverley."

To please the girls more than herself, for lost in the beauty of her dream she was quite indifferent, she allowed them to dress her as a Spanish lady for the annual ball. But the endless discussions about dress, in which she had to join, wearied her, and she grew impatient, anxious for the ball to be over; she knew it disturbed "Beverley." She fancied, some how, that "Beverley" could be a little jealous, demanded all of her, and resented the least slackening of her attention.

When they had finished dressing her, piling her hair high with a tortoiseshell comb, draping a Spanish shawl, borrowed from the shop, about her shoulders, at her from the glass, she felt for the first time a little throb of vanity. She stared at herself sombrely, while the girls who had dressed her exclaimed with delight at the picture she made.

"All the men will fall in love with you tonight, Lorna," they declared.

She shook her head. Men did not care for her; she had realised that long ago. She had nothing in the world but "Beverley," and would "Beverley" always content her? A cold little wind of doubt seemed to blow over her and dimmed for a moment the brightness of her dream.

She was not a success at the ball. Attracted by her appearance, men asked her to dance, then chilled by her lack of response drifted off. She could find nothing to say to them, and their smooth, blank faces, the knowledge of her own inadequacy, terrified her. She felt alone in a hostile world, exposed to forces with which she was powerless to deal. She looked round. The door was close by and she could easily slip out. No one would miss her, and if they did she could say she had a headache. The tortoiseshell comb was hurting her head anyway, dragging her hair down. A farce to dress as a Spanish lady ... a farce... Why had she come? Why hadn't she made an excuse? Anything would have done.

A sob rose in her throat, but she choked it down. Slowly she edged nearer the door, her whole mind intent on the thought of getting out unobserved.

She had almost gained it when something impelled her to turn. Across the room, leaning negligently against the wall, his hands thrust into the pockets of his shabby Norfolk suit, was a tall fair-haired young man. His grey eyes were looking straight at her. They were calm, friendly eyes, eyes that seemed to understand her panic and yet smile it away.

Lorna drew a deep breath. She no longer felt lost in a hostile world. Here was some one who could hold out a friendly hand to her. The thought gave her courage. He seemed isolated, too; his shabby suit put an immense gulf between himself and the other men in their conventional evening clothes, but so far from this daunting him, he appeared amused... amused and interested, Lorna thought, as though he were looking at something quite new for the first time.

Others had noticed him also, and apparently his presence was resented. One girl, pausing in the dance to fix the buckle of her shoe, shrugged her shoulders in answer to Lorna's question.

"Who is he? One of the storemen, I believe. A new man." Scorn rang in her voice, for nowhere else is the line of demarcation drawn quite so finely as in big establishments such as Smith's. "He's no right here, anyway. Do you see his clothes? He must think he has come in fancy dress. Why don't you make up to him, Lorna?" she added a little maliciously. "He's been staring at you all the evening."

She whirled off. Unconscious of her slight maliciousness, Lorna looked at him again. Even in his shabby suit he had an air about him which the other

men lacked. He was still leaning against the wall, that taint smile on his lips, when suddenly as though a message had flashed between them he made his way to her.

"Little Spanish girl," he said, "will you dance with me?" There was grace in his bow and his voice was pleasant. Without hesitation Lorna slipped into his arms and he guided her through the maze of dancers. Neither spoke till the music stopped. Then he drew her a little apart, and she looked up at him gravely.

"Will you tell me your name?" she asked.

"You won't like it," he said, and laughed. "George Smith— a good, solid, respectable name, but not romantic. I know yours," he went on. "Lorna." His voice lingered over it. "I've watched you quite a lot though you never saw me. saw me. I wonder what you think about all day behind your counter? Your mind's not there with the ribbons, is it? It's miles away."

An awful fear tore her heart. "Beverley" — "Beverley" was in danger. She must not tell him, yet she longed to. Unconsciously she stiffened a little, and her eyes bent on his became coldly watchful.

"You're not angry, are you?" he said. "I won't ask you if you don't want to tell me. Shall we get out of this? The air is stifling."

She did not want to go with him. She was afraid, terribly afraid, that she would tell him of "Beverley— "Beverley" that was hers and must be kept inviolate— but she found herself getting her cloak and leaving the hall with him.

He took her home, back to the dingy house in Richmond, across the broad spaces of the Fitzroy Gardens, where the globes of the electric lamps glowed like golden moons through the trees. And there she told him of "Beverley."

She could not see his face except as a white, indistinct blur, but she knew that he saw "Beverley" as she did.

That night, lying in her bed and staring at the little window which opened on to a narrow passage facing a blank fence, she was happy. But towards dawn she awoke with a start.

"Beverley" — would "Beverley" understand that she had to tell him?

"Beverley" was long in coming that day. Quite half the morning had passed before she saw it on the hillside with the white road going through the bush and the blue hills above, and though she stared at it hungrily, telling herself it was still the same, she knew its dear outlines were blurred, the whole picture a little dimmed, like a mirror faintly breathed upon.

George Smith was waiting for her that evening. She had wondered, half hoping, half fearing, but

When she saw him she hesitated. If she took him into her life she would lose "Beverley." As it was, "Beverley" had receded a little, but she could win it back again if she freed her mind of him. Could she bear to lose 'Beverley', lose all that dear dream had meant to her?

George saw her hesitation and was watching her with a little puzzled frown. He had checked his first impulsive movement towards her and drawn back into the shadow of the doorway. He was there and she must make her choice. Clearly he left it to her.

A flower-seller held up a bunch of roses. She shook her head, her eyes half-blind with tears. There were roses blooming now in the garden at "Beverley"— "Beverley" that she meant to betray. She must give up the dream for the reality.

"Beverley" was slow in going. It faded a little day by day, as though even yet it would give her a chance of recalling it if she would. She watched it passing from her sight, growing fainter and fainter like a ship disappearing below the horizon, until last it was gone.

When George asked her about it she silenced him. She had promised to marry him, and she felt that even to think of "Beverley" now was a disloyalty to him. For he could not give her a "Beverley". The only home he could give her would be a little house in a side street, the sort of home she had known her life, but she would love it for his sake.

THEY WERE married late on a Saturday afternoon in autumn, by a tired clergyman obviously impatient to get it over, with two strangers for witnesses. George said he had his holidays then, and Lorna could leave the Emporium and say nothing about it. So they returned from their honeymoon they could settle where they were going to live, and in the meantime he was taking her to the Dandenongs, as a friend had lent him a house there. Except that Lorna left a note for her father, they told no one of their marriage.

As the train ran out of the station they looked back at the city. Melbourne was bathed in a pearly grey mist shot with rose and gold.

"It's like a dream city," said Lorna, softly, "But no, it's not," she added quickly. "It's real— real! I met you there."

"And I made you lose 'Beverley,' " he said gently.

She forced herself to meet his eyes with a smile.

" 'Beverley' was only a dream, but you— you're real."

It was just turning dusk when they reached the station in the hills.

"Shall we walk?" asked George. "It's not far— up the hill and round the corner."

There was a white road stretching up the hill and the dark bush came out to meet it. The air was full of the scent of burning off from the orchards in the valleys. They went in silence. Lorna could not speak. This white road reminded her of "Beverley."

As they turned the corner the round head of Mount Dandenong showed a dark bulk against the sky. At the bend of the road stood a bungalow with roses climbing about the verandah and a curl of smoke rising from its tiny red chimney. Lorna gave a little cry and ran forward.

Then she stopped short. "Beverley" was written in shining letters on the gate.

"It's yours, Lorna," said George hoarsely. "All yours. 'Beverley' just as you dreamt it. Your sitting-room looking on to the mountain, and the little white kitchen. It's yours."

"Don't make fun of me," she said in a low voice.

"Make fun of you! *I*?" He was wounded to the quick. "How could you think it? Lorna, 'Beverley' is yours. I've built it for you. All these months I've been plotting and dreaming for this moment. I remembered everything you said. Lorna, you'll forgive me, won't you, for not telling the whole truth? I'm not quite what you thought me. My father is Smith, of Smith's Emporium. He told me I was a young waster and couldn't hold a job down on my own merits, and, anyhow, I'd be afraid to try. So I took him at his word. No one knew me there and I managed to get a job at his store. I held it down all right. When I told him yesterday he was quite pleased with me."

But she scarcely heard him.

"Beverley" with its tiny latticed windows shining through the dusk was waiting for her to claim it.

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10: The Ring

Capel Boake

Table Talk (Vic.) 28 Nov 1929

NEVER had Clive Barlow desired an inanimate thing so much as he desired that ring. It lay on the counter before him, the translucent depths of the emerald as green as the deep heart of the sea. Its setting was a work of art. He had studied it carefully and decided that it was meant to represent a sea monster of some kind. Inside a curious device had been embossed a crown over what appeared to be crossed keys. The ring had attracted him when he saw it in the window looking for a present to give Judith on her return from abroad. Closer inspection had fired his desire to obtain it.

"How much?" he asked.

The antique dealer gave him an appraising glance. His black beady eyes narrowed as he pondered; then he named a price in keeping with what he judged the other's banking account to be.

Hearing it, Clive pursed his lips in a dubious whistle. It was pretty stiff— no doubt the old robber guessed he wanted it— and he had had a lot of expenses lately, but it was just the sort of thing that Judith would love. She was coming back next week, and there were one or two little things on his conscience.

That last affair, for instance, that he had quite unwittingly slipped into. He doubted if even Judith's tolerance would cover that if she ever chanced to discover it. Well, it was over, thank God, and settled finally. What a fool he had. always been about women— couldn't resist them somehow, even though Judith was the only woman he had ever loved, or ever would love. As for that little girl— It wasn't his fault that she had taken him more seriously than he had intended.

Well, he would take the ring, anyway. Even if Judith thought it was in the nature of a sop to his conscience she would say nothing. Her tact was flawless. Not even to himself would he admit that it might be merely indifference.

"Will you take a cheque?" he asked curtly.

"Certainly," replied the antique dealer.

Clive made out the cheque and watched the old man as he examined it carefully. Curious old chap, he thought. It was obvious that he didn't care whether he made a sale or not. He had made no attempt to sell the ring, only handed it silently for his inspection when he had asked to see it.

"Everything all right?" he asked. "You'll find my name and address in the telephone book if you have any doubt."

"Everything is quite correct," answered the antique dealer.

"I'll take the ring, then."

"Just a moment, sir," The old man picked up the ring and balanced it on the palm of his thin hand. "You are no doubt aware of the origin of this, ring?"

"Origin? No." Clive looked surprised. "Never thought about it, as a matter of fact. I liked the ring, that's all."

"No?" The black beady eyes studied him as though he were a picture brought in for his inspection; taking note of the bold outline of the features, the strong, aggressive chin, the hair curling back from the forehead. "Then it will be a surprise to you to learn that in all probability this ring belonged to Cesare Borgia?"

"Cesare Borgia! What! The chap who poisoned people?" Clive stared, then grinned. "Of course, that's all bunk! You're pulling my leg."

"I repeat, sir," an angry flush crept into the old man's cheeks, "this ring belonged to Cesare Borgia. If you will examine it with any intelligence you will see for yourself. The workmanship, for instance, the sea monster clasping the emerald, undoubtedly belongs to the Renaissance period during which Cesare Borgia flourished. And look here, sir." He turned the ring over and pointed to the curious embossed device which Clive had already noticed. "Don't you realise the meaning of that?"

"No; I can't say I do." Clive was beginning to feel glad that he had already paid for. the ring. Otherwise in his enthusiasm the old chap might have felt Inclined to jump the price up. "What is it?"

"That," said the old man, in a hushed voice, "is one of the coat of arms used by Cesare; the papal keys surmounted by a crown. And above it, hardly visible to the naked eye, but seen quite distinctly through a magnifying glass, are his initials— C.B.— the initials of Cesare Borgia."

"By Jove, that's queer!" exclaimed Clive, almost persuaded to believe. "It certainly looks like it. I don't suppose— you're sure it's not a fake?"

"A fake! Why should I trouble to lie to you? Is not the ring already yours?"

"Yes; that's true." Clive took up the, ring and examined it again. "You say his initials are there? Why, look here!" He paused, struck by a sudden thought. "It's rather a curious coincidence, but those are my initials also."

"I had already noticed that. And here is another coincidence—you are not unlike the handsome Cesare yourself."

"I am?" Clive flushed, feeling a little foolish, but nevertheless he glanced involuntarily at his reflection in a mirror opposite. "Oh, that's nonsense. The Borgias were Romans, and I've no Italian blood in me, though I believe I had a Spanish great-grandmother."

"Exactly so," the old man went on in his pedantic voice. "You fall into a common error when you assume that the Borgias were Romans. The Borgias

were Italianised Spaniards. Yes, sir, when you came in I was struck by your resemblance to the handsome but vicious Cesare."

Clive frowned; the old man was beginning to annoy him.

"Well, that's hardly my fault, is it? Thanks for the information, anyway." He slipped the ring Into his pocket and turned on his heel.

"Good afternoon."

"Good afternoon, sir," returned the old man softly.

"Old fool," thought Clive angrily. "I woma-.

what he was getting at?"

was miserably cold, with a steel grey sky, a wind with a breath of snow in it. Clive strode on, his shoulders hunched against the cold, pausing to slip a shilling into the box of a blind man huddled up at the corner. Back at the office he worked steadily for an hour or so, then, thrusting his papers aside, he leant back in his chair, his feet on the desk, and lit a cigarette. He smoked thoughtfully for a while, his blue eyes frowning, then, stubbing out his cigarette, he put his finger on the bell.

His secretary appeared, a tall, thin girl, with a sallow skin and untidy, straggly hair. A plain creature this, but an efficient machine. He had found it unsettling to have pretty girl in his employ. She held her note, book and pencil and drew a chair quietly up to the desk.

He fingered his chin, looking at her doubtfully; perhaps, after all, it would be better to do the job himself; but, hang it all, what did if matter what she thought?

He dictated a couple of letters, then: "That will be all, thank you, Miss Smyth. Oh, by the way," he added, in a carefully casual tone. "I wish you would go out and buy me all the books you can find on Cesare Borgia."

"Cesare Borgia " exclaimed the girl in amazement.

"Er— yes." He added, with attempted jocularity: "He was an Italianised Spaniard, you know— a great hand at poisoning people."

"Oh, I know all about him, sir," said the girl primly.

"You do, do you? Well, you know more than I do. Hurry off and fetch them along. I'm waiting."

When she had gone he took the ring from his pocket and examined it again. Cesare Borgia, eh? That was probably all rot, and yet he had a queer, excited feeling, stronger than reason, that the ring really had belonged to Cesare Borgia. He slipped it on the forefinger of his right hand and gazed at it. Lovely, lovely thing: how exquisite it would look on Judith's slender hand. He must take it to a jeweller tomorrow and have it made smaller.

A present from Cesare Borgia to his love! His face flushed at the thought.

Judith... she was coming back. Six months was a long time to live without her— at least it was to him. He didn't know about Judith. He never could tell what she was thinking or feeling.. She never put herself away, not like those other— incidents— which were so unpleasant to recall when they had definitely ceased to be anything else but— incidents. Her personality eluded him; behind the barrier of her calm, aloof detachment, she remained inviolate. After six years of marriage she still remained to him an enchanting enigma.

She knew him pretty well though; he was vividly conscious of that. Not much escaped those long, narrow, heavy-lidded eyes of hers. She had laughed when, just before she left for England he had installed the plain Miss Smyth as his secretary.

"What's happened to the pretty blonde you had?"

"Oh, she's gone," he answered awkwardly. "Pretty women disorganise an office. The clerks fall in love with them and it's bad for business."

She had laughed at that, throwing back her head and showing the line of her long white throat: "I suppose it is only the clerks?"

For answer he had put his arm around her shoulder, drawing her closer, staring into her eyes and noting the little sparks of green in them like broken pieces of opal. "You know— no one matters beside you."

"Why, of course not?" She drew herself away. "You surely don't think I'm jealous, Clive?"

How he wished that she were!

The telephone at his elbow rang, and he answered it. It was a message from the shipping office; the *Orontes* was in wireless touch with Australia.

He opened the writing pad. What to say? He thought a moment, then wrote slowly:

"Welcome home; love, Clive."

He pictured her receiving it, reading the message; then crumpling it up and throwing it aside.

He touched the bell and a clerk came hurrying in. He handed him the message telling him to have it sent off at once.

"And, by the way," he added, as the man turned to go. "You booked that ticket for tonight's express to Sydney and left it at the address I gave you?"

Something flickered, in the man's eyes: it was only a moment, then it was gone again.

"Yes, sir," he answered. "Also a sleeping berth, and a seat in the observation car."

"Quite right. That will be all, thank you. Oh, just a moment." When Judith left he had shut up the house leaving only a housekeeper and a gardener in charge, and he himself had lived in a flat in the city. "You might ring up my

housekeeper, tell her that Mrs Barlow will be back next week, and that I wish her to engage a staff and have the house ready for occupation."

"Very well, sir."

The clerk left the room, and he settled down to work again. When Miss Smyth came in with the books under her arm he asked her to tell the office boy to take them to his flat. He was conscious , of her curious, sidelong glance as she obeyed him.

After dinner that night he settled down to read, a blazing fire on the hearth, whisky and cigarettes on a small, table beside him. The turbulent, lascivious, pleasure-hunting lives of the Borgias engrossed him. He stared at the portraits of Cesare and the fair, beautiful, wistful-looking Lucrezia, wondering if she was indeed as wicked as history painted her. He read of their devices for getting rid of inconvenient friends and enemies... the poison banquet.... the poison glove and ring.... the clasp of the hand which meant instant death.

He wasn't so keen now on giving the ring to Judith. If it had indeed belonged to Cesare Borgia, it had, to say the least of it, very unpleasant associations. Of course, it was ridiculous to suppose that it was a poison ring, but just to make sure he had examined it very closely, but found, no trace of any hidden mechanism. Tomorrow he would take it to a jeweller. The expert eye would no doubt find what might have been hidden from him..

The clock, struck nine. Suddenly tired of the Borgias, he put the books aside and yawned. There was a splutter of rain against the window. What a beast of a night... but it was warm and cosy inside.

His head drooped forward arid he drowsed a little. This time next week. Judith would be with him... this time, next week.

He was aroused by the porter, who came in apologetically.

"Lady to see you, sir."

"Lady , to see me?"

"Yes, sir. Seems a bit upset."

It was impossible that it could be Mona. She should have been on her way to Sydney by this time, and yet—

"What's she like?" he asked quickly.

The man hesitated.

"Well, it's, like this, sir. She's crying and she keeps her face hidden."

Clive swore under his breath. Mona! It must be she. It was just the sort of thing she would do. He could have groaned aloud. What in the name of all that was' wonderful had brought her here? .And just, when he had thought the affair, was all nicely rounded off. How there would be a scene; tears and reproaches.

"Send her in," he growled.

He sprang to his feet and walked rapidly up and down the room. What a fool he had been, what a fool! He should have taken her down to the train himself and made certain that she had gone.

There was the sound of faltering footsteps outside, and then a timid little tap at the door. So she was afraid, was she? Well, she might be, to come back after her solemn promise. But insensibly at the sound of that timid little tap he softened. After all she had been fond of him, and there still remained a week to get rid of her before Judith's return.

He threw open the door.

"So it is you," he said. "Come in."

She obeyed and raised a tear-stained face to him.

"You're angry with me," she faltered.

"Well, you don't expect me to be pleased, do you— making a fool of me— in front of the porter." He slammed the door and faced her frowning. "Why have you come here? Didn't I pay that woman in Sydney a hundred pounds to take you into that dressmaking business and wire her that you were leaving today? She'll be expecting you. Why didn't you go? What did you do with your ticket?"

"I— I cancelled it, Clive."

"Cancelled it! Well, that's pretty cool. Anyway, you'll go tomorrow. I'll ring up the railways and fix it for you. Do you understand?"

The girl looked at him, but did not answer With her white face and golden hair, her slender body crumpled up against the divan, she reminded him uneasily of a broken lily. He felt a pang of pity for her.

"Look here," he said, "I don't want to be unkind, but you've broken your part of the bargain. You promised me that you would go to-day."

"Yes, I know.' Her voice broke. "But I couldn't. I wanted to see you again. Clive, don't send me away. Let me stay here. I love you."

This was horrible! The perspiration stood out on his forehead. The mess a man got himself into through sheer folly.

"Mona, let's have this thing straight. You went into it with your eyes open. You were a dear little kid, and I was fond of you, but you knew I didn't love you. Come on, answer me. You knew that?"

The girl covered her eyes with her hand.

"Yes; I knew that."

"I was quite straight with you. You knew that I was married and that I was. dashed lonely. I wanted someone to go around with, and to be " He hesitated. "Well, to be a little nice to me. It was a bargain, wasn't it? I mean I gave you a good time— dinners and ' dances and theatres and things— and I've looked

after your, future for you. You're a dashed sight better off now than before I met you."

"But I was happy then," said the girl tonelessly. "Oh, you gave me a good time all right— dinners and dances and expensive wines and cigarettes. Do you think I wanted them? It was only you. I thought you'd just have to love me in the end because I loved you so much."

Her simplicity touched him. It was a terrible thing to love without hope of return. Didn't he love Judith in just that way. He took her hand in his.

"My dear," he said, "I'm sorry if I've hurt you. I wouldn't have done it for the world. Forgive me."

"Clive!" She flung her arms around his neck. "You'll let me stay?"

He put her away from him and stood up.'

"It's no good Mona. You must go. Over there in Sydney you'll meet some other chap. You'll soon forget. You'll be surprised how easy it will be."

"I'll never forget you, Clive," sobbed the girl.

"Oh, yes, you will. You say you love me? Well, you can do one thing for me now. Go to Sydney tomorrow and try and forget me. I didn't tell you this before, but my wife is coming home next week and— I love her. That's why you must go."

He saw the chill that fell over her at his words, hardening her face till it looked like a white mask.'

"You love her?"

He bowed his head without speaking.

"Then why—?"

"Don't ask me that— I was lonely, dissatisfied— you were pretty— and so—"

"I see. You needn't go on. Thank you for telling me, anyway." He marvelled at her composure as she took out her powder puff, used her lip stick and dabbed rouge on her cheeks. "I'd better be going now."

"You will go to Sydney tomorrow?" he asked almost timidly.

"Yes. You needn't be afraid. I won't bother you again."

"Thank you. Mona!" He felt desperately sorry for her! the broken, bitter little thing. "We're friends, aren't we? You'll forgive me? Shake hands to show everything is all right,"

She took his outstretched hand, clung to it for a moment, then pressed it hard against her cheek.

"Clive, Clive!" she murmured, and ran from the room.

He remained where she had left him staring fixedly into vacancy. His face looked livid; his blue eyes were stony with fear. He raised his hand and stared at the ring. When he had pressed his hand against. her cheek he had distinctly

felt a prick on his finger. He remembered the Borgias... the ring... the hidden poison released by a pressure of the hand.

With a snarl of terror he tore the ring from his finger. There, on the flesh, was a small incision; a tiny drop of blood gathered as he stared at it. He flung the ring across the floor. It struck the table and bounced across the hearth rug. He could see the translucent depths of the emerald as green as the. deep heart of the sea. He felt as though he were drowning in it...

His head began to throb, and his throat seemed to swell. He found difficulty in breathing; He tore his collar off and sucked madly at his finger, spitting into the fire.

"This is the end." he moaned "God, help me." What shall I do?"

There was Jack Fowler. He was a doctor. Perhaps he could give him an antidote— do something—

He dragged himself to the telephone. The room began to be darkening; a dreadful sensation of nausea threatened to overcome him. He could hardly see to turn the dial. Jack's voice answered him. Thank God, he was in.

"Jack— I'm poisoned—"

The receiver swung down and he fell back. This was death. His last coherent thought was that Mona would be sorry.

"I CAN'T understand it," said Dr. Fowler, discussing the case with Judith a week or so later. "He said he was poisoned, but I could find no trace of it. All, his organs were as sound as a bell, too. The only explanation I can give is that something frightened him, and that he died of shock, brought on by fear."

"But— Clive— to die of fear! It's impossible!"

"The mind plays queer tricks with the body."

There was a silence. Dr. Fowler looked at the impassive face of the woman, wondering: what she was thinking. Suddenly she spoke. "There was a woman here on the night he died."

Dr. Fowler started. That was a matter he had hoped to keep hidden from Judith.

"How do you know?"

"She came to see me. She— she loved Clive." Judith opened her hand. "See, this ring— Clive must have bought it for me. She told me he was wearing it that night. She noticed it because she thought how strange it was that he should be wearing such a thing."

"That is the ring I found on the floor."

"Yes." Judith turned it over, her delicate brows knitted. "I wonder why it was on the floor?"

"He probably put it on the mantelpiece and it fell off. No mystery about that."

"No, I suppose not," but her tone said that she was still uncertain.

"It's a lovely thing," said the doctor.

"Do you think so?" Judith put it down with a shudder. "It seems evil to me somehow. No," she added in a low voice. "I don't think I could ever bear to wear it."

11: The Camp on Cattle Creek

Edward S. Sorenson

1869-1939

The Sunday Times (NSW) 15 Dec 1901

Two propectors, a gold strike, and trouble

MAURICE QUAILEY was well known about Coranga as a lucky prospector. He mostly went out alone, and on foot, leading an old horse packed with provisions. Coranga would hear no more of him for a month or six weeks, when he and the old horse would suddenly appear again in the town. He always came with a good parcel of gold, which he managed to divide pretty evenly between the two pubs and the general store during the following fortnight. A week "on tick," and another week getting over his spree would end his spell in Coranga, and he and the old horse would disappear among the mountains once more.

This had been the routine of Maurice Quailey's career for two years past. So regular had been his comings and goings that the publicans knew within a few days when to look for his return.

But one day the old horse returned alone with Quailey's swag and camp-ware packed upon him. Days passed and there was no appearance of Quailey. The inhabitants of Coranga became excited and speculative, and finally a couple of search parties went out to look for him. They found a deserted camp on Cattle Creek, 20 miles from the little town, but of Maurice Quailey they heard nothing, nor was he ever seen again at Coranga.

On his last trip out Maurice Quailey had met an old mate whom he had not seen for several years. This was Steve Brice, a much younger man than himself, who had mined a good deal with him about the patchy little fields of Nanango, and who had been on more than one droving trip with him to Homebush Yards. They had been the best of mates, and it was only a chance "job for one" on a station that parted them.

"How 'ave yer been gettin' on ever since?" Quailey enquired.

"Pretty badly," Steve answered. "I've been battling along dead broke this fortnight. I never did have any luck, somehow."

Dropping his swag by the roadside, he sat down on it and lit his pipe. Quailey squatted on his heels, whilst the old horse, knowing from long experience that a yarn meant a spell, had pulled up in the shade of a tree.

"Have yer anything in view now?" asked Quailey.

"Nothing. Worse still, I'm an utter stranger here," Brice replied.

"Well, I'll tell yer wot," said Quailey. "I'm off out to Cattle Creek, prospecting. If yer like yer can come with me. It's a lot better'n wages, an' it'll be a change for yer."

"It's a poor spec., anyhow, if it's not better than humpin' bluey," said Steve, only too glad of the opportunity to join his old time mate. His swag was therefore strapped on the old horse, much to that animal's disgust, and together they journeyed to Cattle Creek. Though only 20 miles from Coranga, it required the best part of two days to reach the place, for the track was rugged and difficult, winding through rocky hills, and mountains, till it crossed the Coranga Ranges. A blazed-tree line to the creek, and a cattle-pad down the winding course, brought them to the "One-man Diggings."

On a stony spot, between the creek and a wall of rock, was Quailey's old camp. Under the wall were two water-holes close together. One was surrounded by steep, precipitous banks, and from the dark color of the water was known as the "Black Pool." The water was deep, too, and appeared to run under the rocks.

Standing over it that evening Maurice Quailey said that he would not be surprised to see the legendary bunyip rise from such a pool as that. Long afterwards those words recurred to Steve Brice like a haunting dream.

FOR A MONTH they worked, and did well together on a narrow strip of country along the creek bank. A good quantity of gold had been amassed in that time, and they buried it for safety a foot deep between the camp and the pool, and covered the spot with a flat stone. It came to the time when, according to custom, Quailey should have visited Coranga for his usual jamboree. But he did not go. He showed annoyance even if the matter was mentioned. He became morose, fidgetty and irritable, and his actions and demeanor began to show pretty plainly that he was tired of his mate. Whilst the prospect of wealth had a benignant effect upon the temperament of Steve Brice, it caused an inordinate greed to possess Maurice Quailey. While the money was making he wanted to be alone, as he had always been till now on this new field of his. Yet when Brice, who began to see that he was in the way, proposed a "trip" to town, Quailey would not listen to it.

He was richer now than he had ever been but Brice was just as rich— and that's where the shoe pinched. He owed his rise to Quailey, and it did not seem right that he should take an equal share. He expected Brice to look at it in the same light as he did and surrender— voluntarily, of course— a quarter share as a prospector's reward. He said nothing, however, to Brice, but he thought the more, and brooded over it.

Their rations' were nearly done, and one evening, after putting a damper in the ashes, Brice spoke to him about it.

"One of us will have to go in this week for a fresh supply," he said. "It's no use stoppin' here till we're eaten out. We've done pretty well so far, and we may as well live well."

"I'm going in to-morrow," said Quailey, who was pacing to and fro, as was his wont after sundown, between the tent and the Black Pool. He was puffing meditatively at his pipe, and leaving wreaths of tobacco smoke hanging in the air behind him.

"I'll take the gold with me an' leave it at the post-office for safe custody," he added, after a pause.

"I'll go in with you," said Brice, laconically.

"Why?" asked Quailey, turning sharply, and meeting the other's eyes for the first time.

"Because," said Brice, "it's a monty you'll go on the bust, an' it's at the pubs the gold'll be left, not at the post-office. Anyhow every man likes to look after his own."

"P'rhaps it'd be as well to dissolve partnership," said Quailey, with a sudden flash of temper.

"Just as you like," answered Brice, quietly. "We always got on well together in the old days," he added; "but it's very evident you've altered a good deal since then."

"I s'pose it couldn't be you that's altered?" Quailey returned.

"I haven't become selfish and unsociable, at all events," Brice rejoined. He walked back to the fire, and looked at his damper. It was not quite done, so he raked the ashes over it again; and was turning to go into the tent when Quailey called out to him. He was standing over the Black Pool, looking down at the water.

"There's something down under the bank here," he said, as Brice came up. His voice sounded out of tune, and he appeared nervous. Brice thought it was merely the result of their recent tiff, and took no further notice.

It was nearly dark, and only the hum of mosquitoes could be heard. Brice stepped to the brink and leaned over. Quailey, watching him closely, stepped back a little as if to cross behind him, but, turning quickly, he threw his hands out suddenly against the man's back and pushed him over the bank. He shot head-foremost into the pool and disappeared.

A heavy stone lay close to the bank-brink, and, picking it up, Quailey rested it on his shoulder whilst he watched for his mate to come to the surface. But only a few wavelets rolled back from the shelving rocks, and again only the hum of mosquitoes was heard.

"There'll be no disputes now," he muttered, "an' as no one saw us come out together there'll be no questions asked as to dissolved partnership. An' now I'm goin' to keep up me birthday."

THAT NIGHT was a restless one for Quailey, and his one desire now was to get into Coranga and deaden the immediate memory of his crime in drink.

Early next morning he packed his things, and went for the old horse, which was grazing on an open flat a mile above the camp. He returned as the sun was peeping over the eastern hills, and at once strapped the pack on the horse.

With feverish haste he then took a shovel and turned over the flat stone to dig up the gold. It was soft digging, and a couple of minutes sufficed to clean out the hole. When this was done, Quailey felt as though he had been turned into a lump of ice, and the shovel dropped from his trembling hands. The gold was gone!

Quailey's remarks and observations just here are unprintable.

Desperately and for hours he searched around the camp, turning, over stones, digging wherever the ground appeared to have been disturbed, and finally making wide detours to out the track of the thief.

In the meantime, tired of standing with the pack on him, the old horse had gone off on his own account in the direction of Coranga. He arrived in good order and condition, as previously related, and excited much interest in the little community as to what had become of Mr. Quailey.

Mr. Quailey had given up the search for the gold, and gone in pursuit of his runaway horse. In this, too, he was unsuccessful; and thus was another partnership dissolved, and one which Quailey had not looked for.

He returned to camp at sundown, for what reason not even Quailey himself had any definite idea, for there was nothing left for him— not even a bit of stale damper— and only a faint hope that the gold might yet be hidden among the rocks.

Supperless and miserable, Quailey stood in the moonlight, looking down into the Black Pool, with some mad notion in his head that Brice had stolen the gold and taken it with him into oblivion. He wondered how long it would be before the body would float, and if suspicion would fall on him if by any chance it should be discovered.

Something like a smothered laugh caused Quailey to look up, and there, sitting on the rocks before him, Quailey saw a ghost! It was smoking a pipe, and observing Quailey's abjectness and terror with evident relish.

"My God!" Steve Quailey gasped, staring at the supposed apparition with wide, terrified eyes. To him it was a weird object, uncanny— horrible. His teeth chattered as he looked at it, and his flesh felt cold and clammy. In his chaotic

state of mind there seemed nothing ludicrous in the spectacle of a ghost smoking a pipe. Brice had often sat and smoked like that when alive; and this fact was sufficient to convince him that it was the dead man's ghost come back to haunt him for his iniquities.

He attempted to fly from the awful vision, but his trembling legs failed him, and he lost his balance in turning. For a moment he tottered on the brink, then, with a wild cry that echoed through the night, he disappeared headlong into the pool.

The ghost climbed down to render assistance; but the Black Pool had claimed Maurice Quailey for its own.

Now the ghost stood alone in the moonlight, and it smoked its pipe, and made remarks:

"It would be strange if that fellow's popped up under that leaf of rock and scrambled out in the cave, as I did... But I think he dropped too far away...Deuced lucky for me, though... If I report it... they'll say I murdered him...Have I to nurse that awful secret for ever?"

The ghost shook its head dismally, and returned to the rocks; but presently it came back, carrying a little bundle and a billy of water. It made a fire in the old place by the camp, and it put the billy on to boil.

Only Maurice Quailey could have seen anything of the spook about the man who, a little later, sat by the fire with a pannikin of tea in his hand, and the coveted gold by his side. Partly a bruised knee, and partly curiosity had urged him to hide all day among the rocks to see what Quailey would do. Now that Quailey was dead, and the horse had taken dumb tidings home, it would, perhaps, cost him his own life to be found in the neighborhood with the gold upon him. For who would believe his story?

Packing up a few scattered things in the moonlight, he started at once across the bush for a southern stock route. And there were none to tell that he had even been at the camp of the lost prospector; and when the latter's aged mother received a bank draft from "W. Jones, a friend of your son Maurice's," it threw no light on the matter.

LONG afterwards, and far away from Cattle Creek, Steve Brice told of a big cave whose only entrance was under water, into which he had accidentally dived and saved his life, and from which he had dived again in the dead of night and dug up his gold. Thus far he had spoken the truth. But he told further that his mate was saved from drowning— only to perish afterwards in the bush while looking for a runaway horse. And the Drought Fiend, draining Black Pool to its dregs, laughed derisively.

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12: Old Applejoy's Ghost

Frank R. Stockton

(Francis Richard Stockton,1834-1902

Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly, Dec 1897

Prolific 18th century US writer of novels and stories, including childrren's stories.

THE LARGE and commodious apartments in the upper part of the old Applejoy mansion were occupied exclusively, at the time of our story, by the ghost of the grandfather of the present owner of the estate.

For many years old Applejoy's ghost had wandered freely about the grand old house and the fine estate of which he had once been the lord and master. But early in that spring a change had come over the household of his grandson, John Applejoy, an elderly man, a bachelor, and— for the later portion of his life— almost a recluse. His young niece, Bertha, had come to live with him, and it was since her arrival that old Applejoy's ghost had confined himself to the upper portions of the house.

This secluded existence, so different from his ordinary habits, was adopted entirely on account of the kindness of his heart. During the lives of two generations of his descendants he knew that he had frequently been seen by members of the family, but this did not disturb him, for in life he had been a man who had liked to assert his position, and the disposition to do so had not left him now. His skeptical grandson John had seen him and spoken with him, but declared that these ghostly interviews were only dreams or hallucinations. As to other people, it might be a very good thing if they believed that the house was haunted. People with uneasy consciences would not care to live in such a place.

But when this fresh young girl came upon the scene the case was entirely different. She was not twenty yet, and if anything should happen which would lead her to suspect that the house was haunted she might not be willing to live there. If that should come to pass, it would be a great shock to the ghost.

For a long time the venerable mansion had been a quiet, darkened, melancholy house. A few rooms only were occupied by John Applejoy and his housekeeper, Mrs. Dipperton, who for years had needed little space in which to pass the monotonous days of their lives. Bertha sang; she danced by herself on the broad piazza; she brought flowers into the house from the gardens, and, sometimes, it almost might have been imagined that the days which were gone had come back again.

One winter evening, when the light of the full moon entered softly through every unshaded window of the house, old Applejoy's ghost sat in a high-backed

chair, which on account of an accident to one of its legs had been banished to the garret. Throwing one shadowy leg over the other, he clasped the long fingers of his hazy hands and gazed thoughtfully out the window.

"Winter has come," he said to himself. "And in two days it will be Christmas!" Suddenly he started to his feet. "Can it be," he exclaimed, "that my close-fisted grandson John does not intend to celebrate Christmas! It has been years since he has done so, but now that Bertha is in the house, will he dare to pass over it as though it were but a common day? It is almost incredible that such a thing could happen, but so far there have been no signs of any preparations. I have seen nothing, heard nothing, smelt nothing. I will go this moment and investigate."

Clapping his misty old cocked hat on his head and tucking the shade of his faithful cane under his arm, he descended to the lower part of the house. Glancing into the great parlors dimly lit by the moonlight, he saw that all the furniture was shrouded in ancient linen covers.

"Humph!" ejaculated old Applejoy's ghost. "He expects no company here!" Forthwith he passed through the dining room and entered the kitchen and pantry. There were no signs that anything extraordinary in the way of cooking had been done, or was contemplated. "Two days before Christmas," he groaned, "and a kitchen thus! How widely different from the olden time when I gave orders for the holidays! Let me see what the old curmudgeon has provided for Christmas."

So saying, old Applejoy's ghost went around the spacious pantry, looking upon shelves and tables. "Emptiness! Emptiness! Emptiness!" he exclaimed. "A cold leg of mutton, a ham half gone, and cold boiled potatoes— it makes me shiver to look at them! Pies? there ought to be rows and rows of them, and there is not one! And Christmas two days off!

"What is this? Is it possible? A chicken not full grown! Oh, John, how you have fallen! A small-sized fowl for Christmas day! And cider? No trace of it! Here is vinegar— that suits John, no doubt," and then forgetting his present condition, he said to himself, "It makes my very blood run cold to look upon a pantry furnished out like this!" And with bowed head he passed out into the great hall.

If it were possible to prevent the desecration of his old home during the sojourn of the young and joyous Bertha, the ghost of old Applejoy was determined to do it, but to do anything he must put himself into communication with some living being. Still rapt in reverie he passed up the stairs and into the chamber where his grandson slept. There lay the old man, his eyelids as tightly closed as if there had been money underneath them. The ghost of old Applejoy stood by his bedside.

"I can make him wake up and look at me," he thought, "so that I might tell him what I think of him, but what impression could I expect my words to make upon a one-chicken man like John? Moreover, if I should be able to speak to him, he would persuade himself that he had been dreaming, and my words would be of no avail!"

Old Applejoy's ghost turned away from the bedside of his descendant, crossed the hall, and passed into the room of Mrs. Dipperton, the elderly housekeeper. There she lay fast asleep. The kindhearted ghost shook his head as he looked down upon her.

"It would be of no use," he said. "She would never be able to induce old John to turn one inch aside from his parsimonious path. More than that, if she were to see me she would probably scream— die, for all I know— and that would be a pretty preparation for Christmas!"

Out he went, and getting more and more anxious in his mind, the ghost passed to the front of the house and entered the chamber occupied by young Bertha. Once inside the door, he stopped reverently and removed his cocked hat.

The head of the bed was near the uncurtained window, and the bright light of the moon shone upon a face more beautiful in slumber than in the sunny hours of day. She slept lightly, her delicate eyelids trembled now and then as if they would open, and sometimes her lips moved, as if she would whisper something about her dreams.

Old Applejoy's ghost drew nearer and bent slightly over her. If he could hear a few words he might find out where her mind wandered, what she would like him to do for her.

At last, faintly whispered and scarcely audible, he heard one word, "Tom!"

Old Applejoy's ghost stepped back from the bedside, "She wants Tom! I like that! But I wish she would say something else. She can't have Tom for Christmas— at least, not Tom alone. There is a great deal else necessary before this can be made a place suitable for Tom!"

Again he drew near to Bertha and listened, but instead of speaking, she suddenly opened her eyes. The ghost of old Applejoy drew back, and made a low, respectful bow. The maiden did not move, but fixed her lovely blue eyes upon the apparition, who trembled for fear that she might scream or faint.

"Am I asleep?" she murmured, and then, after turning her head from side to side to assure herself that she was in her own room, she looked full into the face of old Applejoy's ghost, and boldly spoke to him. "Are you a spirit?" said she. If a flush of joy could redden the countenance of a ghost, his face would have glowed like sunlit rose "Dear child," he exclaimed, "I am the ghost of your

uncle's grandfather. His younger sister, Maria, was your mother, and therefore, I am the ghost of your great-grandfather."

"Then you must be the original Appljoy," said Bertha, "and I think it very wonderful that I am not afraid of you. You look as if you would not hurt anybody in this world, especially me!"

"There you have it, my dear!" he exclaimed, bringing his cane down upon the floor with a violence which had it been the cane it used to be would have wakened everybody in the house. "I vow to you there is not a person in the world for whom I have such an affection as I feel for you. You have brought into this house something of the old life. I wish I could tell you how happy I have been since the bright spring day that brought you here."

"I did not suppose I would make anyone happy by coming here," said Bertha. "Uncle John does not seem to care much about me, and I did not know about you."

"No, indeed," exclaimed the good ghost, "you did not know about me, but you will. First, however, we must get down to business. I came here to-night with a special object. It is about Christmas. Your uncle does not mean to have any Christmas in this house, but I intend, if I can possibly do so, to prevent him from disgracing himself. Still, I cannot do anything without help, and there is nobody to help me but you. Will you do it?"

Bertha could not refrain from a smile. "It would be funny to help a ghost," she said, "but if I can assist you I shall be very glad."

"I want you to go into the lower part of the house," said he. "I have something to show you. I shall go down and wait for you. Dress yourself as warmly as you can, and have you some soft slippers that will make no noise?"

"Oh, yes," said Bertha, her eyes twinkling with delight. "I shall be dressed and with you in no time."

"Do not hurry yourself," said the good ghost as he left the room "We have most of the night before us."

When the young girl had descended the great staircase almost as noiselessly as the ghost, she found her venerable companion waiting for her. "Do you see the lantern on the table?" said he. "John uses it when he goes his round of the house at bedtime. There are matches hanging above it. Please light it. You may be sure I would not put you to this trouble if I were able to do it myself."

When she had lighted the brass lantern, the ghost invited her to enter the study. "Now," said he as he led the way to the large desk with the cabinet above it, "will you be so good as to open that glass door and put your hand into the front corner of that middle shelf? You will feel a key hanging upon a little hook."

"But this is my uncle's cabinet," Bertha said, "and I have no right to meddle with his keys and things!"

The ghost drew himself up to the six feet two inches which had been his stature in life. "This was my cabinet," he said, "and I have never surrendered it to your uncle John! With my own hands I screwed the little hook into that dark corner and hung the key upon it! Now I beg you to take down that key and unlock that little drawer at the bottom."

Without a moment's hesitation Bertha took the key from the hook unlocked and opened the drawer. "It is full of old keys all tied together in a bunch!" she said.

"Yes," said the ghost. "Now, my dear, I want you to understand that what we are going to do is strictly correct and proper. This was once my house— everything in it I planned and arranged. I am now going to take you into the cellars of my old mansion. They are wonderful cellars; they were my pride and glory! Are you afraid," he said, "to descend with me into these subterranean regions?"

"Not a bit!" exclaimed Bertha. "I think it will be the jolliest thing in the world to go with my great-grandfather into the cellars which he built himself, and of which he was so proud."

This speech so charmed the ghost of old Applejoy that he would instantly have kissed his great-granddaughter had it not been that he was afraid of giving her a cold.

"You are a girl to my liking!" he exclaimed. "I wish you had been living at the time I was alive and master of this house. We should have had gay times together!"

"I wish you were alive now, dear Great-grandpapa," said she. "Let us go on— I am all impatience!"

They then descended into the cellars, which, until the present owner came into possession of the estate, had been famous throughout the neighborhood. "This way," said old Applejoy's ghost. "Do you see that row of old casks nearly covered with cobwebs and dust? They contain some of the choicest spirits ever brought into this country, rum from Jamaica, brandy from France, port and Madeira.

"Come into this little room. Now, then, hold up your lantern. Notice that row of glass jars on the shelf. They are filled with the finest mincemeat ever made and just as good as it ever was! And there are a lot more jars and cans all tightly sealed. I do not know what good things are in them, but I am sure their contents are just what will be wanted to fill out a Christmas table.

"Now, my dear, I want to show you the grandest thing in these cellars. Behold that wooden box! Inside it is an airtight box made of tin. Inside that is a

great plum cake put into that box by me! I intended it to stay there for a long time, for plum cake gets better and better the longer it is kept. The people who eat that cake, my dear Bertha, will be blessed above all their fellow mortals!

"And now I think you have seen enough to understand thoroughly that these cellars are the abode of many good things to eat and to drink. It is their abode, but if John could have his way it would be their sepulchre!"

"But why did you bring me here, Great-grandpapa?" said Bertha "Do you want me to come down here and have my Christmas dinner with you?"

"No, indeed," said old Applejoy's ghost. "Come upstairs, and let us go into the study." Once they were there, Bertha sat down before the fireplace and warmed her fingers over the few embers it contained.

"Bertha," said the spirit of her great-grandfather, "it is wicked not to celebrate Christmas, especially when one is able to do so in the most hospitable and generous way. For years John has taken no notice of Christmas, and it is our duty to reform him if we can! There is not much time before Christmas Day, but there is time enough to do everything that has to be done, if you and I go to work and set other people to work."

"And how are we to do that?" asked Bertha.

"The straightforward thing to do," said the ghost, "is for me to appear to your uncle, tell him his duty, and urge him to perform it, but I know what will be the result. He would call the interview a dream. But there is nothing dreamlike about you, my dear. If anyone hears you talking he will know he is awake."

"Do you want me to talk to Uncle?" said Bertha, smiling.

"Yes," said old Applejoy's ghost. "I want you to go to him immediately after breakfast tomorrow morning and tell him exactly what has happened this night; about the casks of spirits, the jars of mincemeat, and the wooden box nailed fast and tight with the tin box inside holding the plum cake. John knows all about that cake, and he knows all about me, too."

"And what is the message?" asked Bertha.

"It is simply this," said the ghost. "When you have told him all the events of this night, and when he sees that they must have happened, I want you to tell him that it is the wish and desire of his grandfather, to whom he owes everything, that there shall be worthy festivities in this house on Christmas Day and Night. Tell him to open his cellars and spend his money. Tell him to send for at least a dozen good friends and relatives to attend the great holiday celebration that is to be held in this house.

"Now, my dear," said old Applejoy's ghost, drawing near to the young girl, "I want to ask you— a private, personal question. Who is Tom?"

At these words a sudden blush rushed into the cheeks of Bertha. "Tom?" she said. "What Tom?"

"I am sure you know a young man named Tom, and I want you to tell me who he is. My name was Tom, and I am very fond of Toms. Is he a nice young fellow? Do you like him very much?"

"Yes," said Bertha, meaning the answer to cover both questions.

"And does he like you?"

"I think so," said Bertha.

"That means you are in love with each other!" exclaimed old Applejoy's ghost. "And now, my dear, tell me his last name. Out with it!"

"Mr. Burcham," said Bertha, her cheeks now a little pale.

"Son of Thomas Burcham of the Meadows?"

"Yes, sir," said Bertha.

The ghost of old Applejoy gazed down upon his great-granddaughter with pride and admiration "My dear Bertha," he exclaimed, "I congratulate you! I have seen young Tom. He is a fine-looking fellow, and if you love him I know he is a good one. Now, I'll tell you what we will do, Bertha. We will have Tom here on Christmas."

"Oh, Great-grandfather, I can't ask Uncle to invite him!" she exclaimed.

"We will have a bigger party than we thought we would," said the beaming ghost. "All the invited guests will be asked to bring their families. When a big dinner is given at this house, Thomas Burcham, Sr., must not be left out, and he is bound to bring Tom. Now skip back to your bed, and immediately after breakfast come here to your uncle and tell him everything I have told you to tell him."

Bertha hesitated. "Great-grandfather," she said, "if Uncle does allow us to celebrate Christmas, will you be with us?"

"Yes, indeed, my dear," said he. "And you need not be afraid of my frightening anybody. I shall be everywhere and I shall hear everything, but I shall be visible only to the loveliest woman who ever graced this mansion. And now be off to bed without another word."

"If she hadn't gone," said old Applejoy's ghost to himself, "I couldn't have helped giving her a good-night kiss."

The next morning, as Bertha told the story of her night's adventures to her uncle, the face of John Applejoy grew paler and paler. He was a hard-headed man, but a superstitious one, and when Bertha told him of his grandfather's plum cake, the existence of which he had believed was not known to anyone but himself, he felt it was impossible for the girl to have dreamed these things. With all the power of his will he opposed this belief, but it was too much for

him, and he surrendered. But he was a proud man and would not admit to his niece that he put any faith in the existence of ghosts.

"My dear," said he, rising, his face still pale, but his expression under good control, "although there is nothing of weight in what you have told me— for traditions about my cellars have been afloat in the family— still your pretty little story suggests something to me. This is Christmastime and I had almost overlooked it. You are young and lively and accustomed to the celebration of holidays. Therefore, I have determined, my dear, to have a grand Christmas dinner and invite our friends and their families. I know there must be good things in the cellars, although I had almost forgotten them, and they shall be brought up and spread out and enjoyed. Now go and send Mrs. Dipperton to me, and when we have finished our consultation, you and I will make out a list of guests."

When she had gone, John Applejoy sat down in his big chair and looked fixedly into the fire. He would not have dared to go to bed that night if he had disregarded the message from his grandfather.

Never had there been such a glorious Christmastime within the walls of the old house. The news that old Mr. Applejoy was sending out invitations to a Christmas dinner spread like wildfire through the neighborhood. The idea of inviting people by families was considered a grand one, worthy indeed of the times of old Mr. Tom Applejoy, the grandfather of the present owner, who had been the most hospitable man in the whole country.

For the first time in nearly a century all the leaves of the great dining table were put into use, and the table had as much as it could do to stand up under its burdens brought from cellar, barn, and surrounding country. In the very middle of everything was the wonderful plum cake which had been put away by the famous grandfather of the host.

But the cake was not cut. "My friends," said Mr. John Applejoy, "we may all look at this cake but we will not eat it! We will keep it just as it is until a marriage shall occur in this family. Then you are all invited to come and enjoy it!"

At the conclusion of this little speech old Applejoy's ghost patted his grandson upon the head. "You don't feel that, John," he said to himself, "but it is approbation, and this is the first time I have ever approved of you!"

Late in the evening there was a grand dance in the great hall, which opened with an old-fashioned minuet, and when the merry guests were forming on the floor, a young man named Tom came forward and asked the hand of Bertha.

"No," said she, "not this time. I am going to dance this first dance with— well, we will say by myself!"

At these words the most thoroughly gratified ghost in all space stepped up to the side of the lovely girl, and with his cocked hat folded flat under his left arm, he made a low bow and held out his hand. With his long waistcoat trimmed with lace, his tightly drawn stockings and his buckled shoes, there was not such a gallant figure in the whole company.

Bertha put out her hand and touched the shadowy fingers of her partner, and then, side by side, she and the ghost of her great-grandfather opened the ball. With all the grace of fresh young beauty and ancient courtliness they danced the minuet.

"What a strange young girl," said some of the guests, "to go through that dance all by herself, but how beautifully she did it!"

"Very eccentric, my dear!" said Mr. John Applejoy when the dance was over. "But I could not help thinking as I looked at you that there was nobody in this room that was worthy to be your partner."

"You are wrong there, old fellow!" was the simultaneous mental ejaculation of young Tom Burcham and of old Applejoy's ghost.

13: The Magic Egg

Frank R. Stockton

The Century Magazine, June 1894
Weird Tales, May 1930

THE PRETTY LITTLE theater attached to the building of the Unicorn Club had been hired for a certain January afternoon by Mr. Herbert Loring, who wished to give therein a somewhat novel performance to which he had invite a small audience consisting entirely of friends and acquaintances.

Loring was a handsome fellow about thirty years old, who had traveled far and studied much. He had recently made a long sojourn in the far East, and his friends had been invited to the theater to see some of the wonderful things he had brought from that country of wonders. As Loring was a clubman, and belonged to a family of good social standing, his circle of acquaintances was large, and in this circle a good many unpleasant remarks had been made regarding the proposed entertainment— made, of course, by the people who had hot been invited to be present. Some of the gossip on the subject had reached Loring, who did not hesitate to say that he could not talk to a crowd, and that he did not care to show the curious things he had collected to people who would not thoroughly appreciate them. He had been very particular in regard to his invitations.

At three o'clock on the appointed afternoon nearly all the people who had been invited to the Unicom theater were in their seats. No one had stayed away except for some very good reason, for it was well known that if Herbert Loring offered to show anything it was worth seeing.

About forty people were present, who sat talking to one another, or admiring the decoration of the theater. As Loring stood upon the stage— where he was entirely alone, his exhibition requiring no assistants— he gazed through a loophole in the curtain upon a very interesting array of faces. There were the faces of many men and women of society, of students, of workers in various fields of thought, and even of idlers in all fields of thought, but there was not one which indicated a frivolous or listless disposition. The owners of those faces had come to see something, and they wished to see it.

For a quarter of an hour after the time announced for the opening of the exhibition Loring peered through the hole in the curtain, and then, although all the people he had expected had not arrived, he felt it would not do for him. to wait any longer. The audience was composed of well-bred and courteous men and women, but despite their polite self-restraint Loring could see that some of them were getting tired of waiting. So, very reluctantly, and feeling that further delay was impossible, he raised the curtain and came forward on the stage.

Briefly he announced that the exhibition would open with some fireworks he had brought from Korea. It was plain to see that the statement that fireworks were about to be set off on a theater stage, by an amateur, had rather startled some of the audience, and Loring hastened to explain that these were not real fireworks, but that they were contrivances made of colored glass, which were illuminated by the powerful lens of a lantern which was placed out of sight, and while the. apparent pyrotechnic display would resemble fireworks of strange and grotesque designs, it would be absolutely without danger. He brought out some little bunches of bits of colored glass, hung them at some distance apart on a wire which was stretched across the stage just high enough for him to reach it, and then lighted his lantern, which he placed in one of the wings, lowered all the lights in the theater, and began his exhibition.

As Loring turned his lantern on one of the clusters of glass lenses, strips, and points, and, unseen himself, caused them to move by means of long cords attached, the effects wore beautiful and marvelous. Little wheels of colored fire rapidly revolved, miniature rockets appeared to rise a few feet and to explode in the air, and while all the ordinary forms of fireworks were produced on a diminutive scale, there were some effects that were entirely novel to the audience. As the light was turned successively upon one and another of the clusters of glass, sometimes it would flash along the whole line so rapidly that all the various combinations of color and motion seemed to be combined in one, and then for a time each particular set of fireworks would blaze, sparkle, and coruscated by itself, scattering particles of colored light, as if they had been real sparks of fire.

This curious and beautiful exhibition of miniature pyrotechnics was extremely interesting to the audience, who gazed upward with rapt and eager attention at the line of wheels, stars, and revolving spheres. So far as interest gave evidence of satisfaction, there was never a better satisfied audience. At first there had been some hushed murmurs of pleasure, but very soon the attention of everyone seemed so completely engros.sed by the dazzling display that they simply gazed in silence.

For twenty minutes or longer the glittering show went on, and not a sign of weariness or inattention was made by any one of the assembled company. Then gradually the colors of the little fireworks faded, the stars and wheels revolved more slowly, the lights in the body of the theater were gradually raised, and the stage curtain went softly down.

Anxiously, and a little pale, Herbert Loring peered through the loophole in the curtain. It was not easy to judge of the effects of his exhibition, and he did not know whether or not it had been a success. There was no applause, but, on

the other hand, there was no sign that anyone resented the exhibition as a childish display of colored lights. It was impossible to look upon that audience without believing that they had been thoroughly interested in what they had seen, and that they expected to see more.

For two or three minutes Loring gazed through his loophole and then, still with some doubt in his heart, but with a little more color in his cheeks, he prepared for the second part of his performance.

At this moment there entered the theater, at the very back of the house, a young lady. She was handsome and well-dressed, and as she opened the door— Loring had employed no ushers or other assistants in this little social performance— she paused for a moment and looked into the theater, and then noiselessly stepped to a chair in the back row, and sat down.

This was Edith Starr, who, a month before, had been betrothed to Herbert Loring. Edith and her mother had been invited to this performance, and front seats had been reserved for them, for each guest had received a numbered card; but Mrs. Starr had a headache, and could not go out that afternoon, and for a time her daughter had thought that she too must give up the pleasure Loring had promised her, and stay with her mother. But when the elder lady dropped into a quiet sleep, Edith thought that, late as it was, she would go by herself, and see what she could of the performance.

She was quite certain that if her presence were known to Loring he would stop whatever he was doing until she had been provided with a seat which he thought suitable for her, for he had made a point of her being properly seated when he gave the invitations. Therefore, being equally desirous of not disturbing the performance and of not being herself conspicuous, she sat behind two rather large men, where she could see the stage perfectly well, but where she herself would not be likely to be seen.

IN A few moments the curtain rose, and Loring came forward, carrying a small, light table, which he placed near the front of the stage, and for a moment stood quietly by it. Edith noticed upon his face the expression of uncertainty and anxiety which had not yet left it. Standing by the side of the table, and speaking very slowly, but so clearly that his words could be heard distinctly in all parts of the room, he began some introductory remarks regarding the second part of his performance,

"The extraordinary, and I may say marvelous, thing which I am about to show you," he said, "is known among East Indian magicians as the magic egg. The exhibition is a very uncommon one, and has seldom been seen by Americans or Europeans, and it was by a piece of rare good fortune that I became possessed of the appliances necessary for this exhibition. They are

indeed very few and simple, but never before, to the best of my knowledge and belief, have they been seen outside of India.

"I will now get the little box which contains the articles necessary for this magical performance, and I will say that if I had time to tell you of the strange and amazing adventure which resulted in my possession of this box, I am sure you would be as much interested in that as I expect you to be in the contents of the box. But, in order that none of you may think this is an ordinary trick, executed by means of concealed traps or doors, I wish you to take particular notice of this table, which is, as you see, a plain, unpainted pine table with nothing but a flat top, and four straight legs at the corners. You can see under and around it, and it gives no opportunity to conceal anything." Then, standing for a few moments as if he had something else to say, he turned and stepped toward one of the wings.

Edith was troubled as she looked at her lover during these remarks. Her interest was great— greater, indeed, than that of the people about her— but it was not a pleasant interest. As Loring stopped speaking, and looked about him, there was a momentary flush on his face. She knew this was caused by excitement, and she was pale from the same cause.

Very soon Loring came forward, and stood by the table.

"Here is the box," he said, "of which I spoke, and as I hold it up I think you can all see it. It is not large, being certainly not more than twelve inches in length and two deep, but it contains some very wonderful things. The outside of this box is covered with delicate engraving and carving which you can not see, and these marks and lines have, I think, some magical meaning, but I do not know what it is. I will now open the box, and show you what is inside. The first thing I take out is this little stick, not thicker than a lead-pencil, but somewhat longer, as you see. This is a magical wand, and is covered with inscriptions of the same character as those on the outside of the box. The next thing is this little red bag, well filled, as you see, which I shall put on the table, for I shall not yet need it.

"Now I take out a piece of cloth which is folded into a very small compass, but as I unfold it you will perceive that it is more than a foot square, and is covered with embroidery. All those strange lines and figures in gold and red, which you can plainly see on the cloth as I hold it up, are also characters in the same magic language as those on the box and wand. I will now spread the cloth on the table, and then take out the only remaining thing in the box, and this is nothing in the world but an egg— a simple, ordinary hen's egg, as you all see as I hold it up. It may be a trifle larger than an ordinary egg, but then, after all, it is nothing but a common egg— that is, in appearance; in reality it is a good deal more.

"Now I will begin the performance," and as he stood by the back of the table over which he had been slightly bending, and threw his eyes over the audience, his voice was stronger, and his face had lost all its pallor. He was evidently warming up with his subject.

"I now take up this wand," he said, "which, while I hold it, gives me power to produce the phenomena which you are about to behold. You may not all believe that there is any magic whatever about this little performance, and that it is all a bit of machinery; but whatever you may think about it, you shall see what you shall see.

"Now with this wand I gently touch this egg which is lying on the square of cloth. I do not believe you can see what has happened to this egg, but I will tell you. There is a little line, like a hair, entirely around it. Now that line has become a crack. Now you can see it, I know. It grows wider and wider! Look! The shell of the egg is separating in the middle. The whole egg slightly moves. Do you notice that? Now you can see something yellow showing itself between the two parts of the shell. See! It is moving a good deal, and the two halves of the .shell are separating more and more! And now out tumbles this queer little object. Do you see what it is? It is a poor, weak, little chick, not able to stand, but alive— alive! You can all perceive that it is alive. Now you can see that it is standing on its feet, feebly enough, but still standing.

"Behold, it takes a few steps! You can not doubt that it is alive, and came out of that egg. It is beginning to walk about over the cloth. Do you notice that it is picking the embroidery? Now, little chick, I will give you something to eat. This little red bag contains grain, a magical grain, with which I shall feed the chicken. You must excuse my awkwardness in opening the bag, as I still hold the wand; but this little stick I must not drop. See, little chick, there are some grains. They look like rice, but, in fact, I have no idea what they are. But he knows, he knows! Look at him! See how he picks it up! There! He has swallowed one, two, three. That will do, little chick, for a first meal.

"The grain seems to have strengthened him already, for see how lively he is, and how his yellow down stands out on him, so puffy and warm! You are looking for some more grain, are you? Well, you can not have it just yet, and keep away from those pieces of egg-shell, which, by the way, I will put back into the box. Now, sir, try to avoid the edge of the table, and to quiet you, I will give you a little tap on the back with my wand. Now, then, please observe closely. The down which just now covered him has almost gone. He is really a good deal bigger, and ever so much uglier. See the little pin-feathers sticking out over him! Some spots, here and there, are almost bare, but he is ever so much more active. Ha! Listen to that! He is so strong that you can hear his beak as he pecks at the table. He is actually growing bigger and bigger before our

very eyes ! See that funny little tail, how it begins to stick up, and quills are showing at the end of his wings.

"Another tap, and a few more grains. Careful, sir! Don't tear the cloth ! See how rapidly he grows! He is fairly covered with feathers, red and black, with a tip of yellow in front. You could hardly get that fellow into an ostrich egg! Now, then, what do you think of him? He is big enough for a broiler, though I don't think anyone would want to take him for that purpose. Some more grain, and another tap from my wand. See! He does not mind the little stick, for he has been used to it from his very birth. Now, then, he is what you would call a good half-grown chick. Rather more than half grown, I should say. Do you notice his tail? There is no mistaking him for a pullet. The long feathers are beginning to curl over, already. He must have a little more grain. Look out, sir, or you will be off the table! Come back here! This table is too small for him, but if he were on the floor you could not see him so well.

"Another tap. Now see that comb on the top of his head; you scarcely noticed it before, and now it is bright red. And see his spurs beginning to show— on good thick legs, too. There is a fine young fellow for you! Look how he jerks his head from side to side, like the young prince of a poultry-yard, as he well deserves to be!"

The attentive interest which had at first characterized the audience now changed to excited admiration and amazement. Some leaned forward with mouths wide open. Others stood up so that they could see -better. Ejaculations of astonishment and wonder were heard on every side, and a more thoroughly fascinated and absorbed audience was never seen.

"Now, my friends,'' Loring continued, "I will give this handsome fowl another tap. Behold the result— a noble, full-grown cock! Behold his spurs; they are nearly an inch long! See, there is a comb for you; and what a magnificent tail of green and black, contrasting so finely with the deep red of the rest of his body! Well, sir, you are truly too big for this table. As I can not give you more room, I will set you up higher. Move over a little, and I will set this chair on the table. There! Up on the seat! That's right, but don't stop; there is the back, which is higher yet! Do with you! Ha! There, he nearly upset the chair, but I will hold it. See! He has turned around. Now, then, look at him. See his wings as he flaps them! He could fly with such wings. Look at him! See that swelling breast! Ha, ha! Listen! Did you ever hear a crow like that? It fairly rings through the house Yes; I knew it? There is another!"

At this point, the people in the house were in a state of wild excitement. Nearly all of them were on their feet, and they were in such a condition of frantic enthusiasm that Loring was afraid some of them might make a run for the stage.

"Come, sir," cried Loring, now almost shouting, "that will do; you have shown us the strength of your lungs. Jump down on the seat of the chair, now on the table. There, I will take away the chair, and you can stand for a moment on the table, and let our friends look at you, but only for a moment. Take that tap on your back. Now do you see any difference? Perhaps you may not, but I do. Yes; I believe you all do. He is not the big fellow he was a minute ago. He is really smaller; only a fine cockerel. A nice tail that, but with none of the noble sweep that it had a minute ago. No; don't try to get off the table. You can't escape my wand. Another tap. Behold a half-grown chicken, good to eat, but with not a crow in him. Hungry, are you? But you need not pick at the table that way. You get no more grain, but only this little tap. Ha! Ha! What are you coming to? There is a chicken barely feathered enough for us to tell what color he is going to be.

"Another tap will take still more of the conceit out of him. Look at him ! There are his pin-feathers, and his bare spots. Don't try to get away; I can easily tap you again. Now, then. Here is a lovely little chick, fluffy with yellow down. He is active enough, but I shall' quiet him. One tap, and now what do you see? A poor feeble chicken, scarcely able to .stand, with his down all packed close to him as if he had been out in the rain. Ah, little chick, I will take the two halves of the egg-shell from which you came, and put them on each side of you. Come now, get in! I close them up; .you are lost to view. There is nothing to be seen but a crack around the shell! Now it has gone! There, my friends, as I hold it on high, behold the magic egg, exactly as it was when I first took it out of the box, into which I will place it again, with the cloth and the wand and the little red bag, and shut it up with a snap. I will let you take one more look at this box before I put it away behind the scenes. Are you satisfied with what I have shown you? Do yon think it is really as wonderful as you supposed it would be?"

At these words the whole audience burst into riotous applause, during which Loring disappeared; but he was back in a moment.

"Thank you!" he cried, bowing low, and waving his arms before him in the manner of an Eastern magician making a salaam. From side to side he turned, bowing and thanking, and then with a hearty, "Good-bye to you, good-bye to you all!" he stepped back, and let down the curtain.

For some moments the audience remained in their seats as if they were expecting something more, and then they rose quietly and began to disperse. Most of them were acquainted with one another, and there was a good deal of greeting and talking as they went out of the theater.

When Loring was sure the last person had departed, he turned down the lights, locked the door, and gave the key to the steward of the club.

He walked to his home a happy man. His exhibition had been a perfect success, with not a break or a flaw in it from beginning to end.

"I feel," thought the young man, as he strode along, "as if I could fly to the top of that steeple, and flap and crow until all the world heard me."

THAT EVENING, as was his daily custom, Herbert Loring called upon Miss Starr. He found the young lady in the library.

"I came in here," she said, "because I have a good deal to talk to you about, and I do not want interruptions."

With this arrangement the young man expressed his entire satisfaction, and immediately began to inquire the cause of her absence from his exhibition in the afternoon.

"But I was there," said Edith. "You did not see me, but I was there. Mother had a headache, and I went by myself."

"You were there!" exclaimed Loring, almost starting from his chair.

"I don't understand. You were not in your seat."

"No," answered Edith; "I was on the very back row of seats. You could not see me, and I did not wish you to see me."

"Edith!" exclaimed Loring, rising to his feet, and leaning over the library table, which was between them. "When did you come? How much of the performance did you see?"

''I was late," she said; "I did not arrive until after the fireworks, or whatever they were."

For a moment Loring was silent, as if he did not understand the situation.

"Fireworks!" he said. "How did you know there had been fireworks?"

"I heard the people talking of them as they left the theater," she answered.

"And what did they say?" he inquired, quickly.

"They seemed to like them very well," she replied, "but I do not think they were quite satisfied. Prom what I heard some persons say, I inferred that they thought it was not very much of a show to which you had invited them."

Again Loring stood in thought, looking down at the table ; but before he could speak again, Edith sprang to her feet.

"Herbert Loring," she cried, " what does all this mean? I was there during the whole of the exhibition of what you called the magic egg. I saw all those people wild with excitement at the wonderful sight of the chicken that came out of the egg, and grew to full size, and then dwindled down again, and went back into the egg, and, Herbert, there was no egg, and there was no little box, and there was no wand, and no embroidered cloth, and there was no red bag, nor any little chick, and there was no full-grown fowl, and there was no chair that you put on the table! There was nothing, absolutely nothing, but you and

that table! And even the table was not what you said it was. It was not an unpainted pine table with four straight legs. It was a table of dark polished wood, and it stood on a single post with feet. There was nothing there that you said was there; everything was a sham and a delusion; every word you spoke was untrue. And yet everybody in that theater, excepting you and me, saw all the things that you said were on the stage. I know they saw them all, for I was with the people, and heard them, and saw them, and at times I fairly felt the thrill of enthusiasm which possessed them as they glared at the miracles and wonders you said were happening."

Loring smiled. "Sit down, my dear Edith," he said. "You are excited, and there is not the slightest cause for it. I will explain the whole affair to you. It is simple enough. You know that study is the great object of my life. I study all sorts of things, and just now I am greatly interested in hypnotism. The subject has become fascinating to me; I have made a great many successful trials of my power, and the affair of this afternoon was nothing but a trial of my powers on a more extensive scale than anything I have yet attempted. I wanted to see if it were possible for me to hypnotize a considerable number of people without anyone suspecting what I intended to do. The result was a success. I hypnotized all those people by means of the first part of my performance, which consisted of some combinations of colored glass with lights thrown upon them. They revolved, and looked like fireworks, and were strung on a wire high up on the stage.

"I kept up the glittering and dazzling show— which was well worth seeing, I can assure you— until the people had been straining their eyes upward for almost half an hour; and this sort of thing— I will tell you if you do not know it— is one of the methods of producing hypnotic sleep.

"There was no one present who was not an impressionable subject, for I was very careful in sending out my invitations, and when I became almost certain that my audience was thoroughly hypnotized, I stopped the show, and began the real exhibition, which was not really for their benefit, but for mine.

"Of course, I was dreadfully anxious for fear I had not succeeded entirely, and that there might be at least some one person who had not succumbed to the hypnotic influences, and so I tested the matter by bringing out that table, and telling them it was something it was not. If I had had any reason for supposing that some of the audience saw the table as it really was, I had an explanation ready, and I could have retired from my position without anyone supposing that I had intended making hypnotic experiments. The rest of the exhibition would have been some things that any one could see, and as soon as possible I would have released from their spell those who were hypnotized. But when I became positively assured that everyone saw a light pine table with

four straight legs, I confidently went on with the performances of the magic egg."

Edith Starr was still standing by the library table. She had not heeded Loring's advice to sit down, and she was trembling with emotion.

"Herbert Loring," she said, "you invited my mother and me to that exhibition. You gave us tickets for front seats, where we would be certain to be hypnotized if your experiment succeeded, and you would have made us see that false show, which faded from those people's minds as soon as they recovered from the spell; for as they went away they were talking only of the fireworks, and not one of them mentioned a magic egg, or a chicken, or anything of the kind. Answer me this: Did you not intend that I should come and be put under that spell?"

Loring smiled. "Yes," he said, "of course I did; but then your case would have been different from that of the other spectators, for I should have explained the whole thing to you, and I am sure we would have had a great deal of pleasure, and profit too, in discussing your experiences. The subject is extremely—"

"Explain to me!" she cried. "You would not have dared to do it! I do not know how brave you may be, but I know you would not have had the courage to come here and tell me that you had taken away my reason and my judgment, as you took them away from all those people, and that you had made me a mere tool of your will— glaring and panting with excitement at the wonderful things you told me to see where nothing existed. I have nothing to say about the others; they can speak for themselves if they ever come to know what you did to them. I speak for myself. I stood up with the rest of the people. I gazed with all my power, and over and over again I asked myself if it could be possible that anything was the matter with my eyes or my brain, and if I could be the only person there who could not see the marvelous spectacle that you were describing. But now I know that nothing was real, not even the little pine table, not even the man!"

"Not even me!" exclaimed Loring, "Surely I was real enough!"

"On that stage, yes," she said; "but you there proved you were not the Herbert Loring to whom I promised myself. He was an unreal being. If he had existed he would not have been a man who would have brought me to that public place, all ignorant of his intentions, to cloud my perceptions, to subject my intellect to his own, and make me believe a lie. If a man should treat me in that way once he would treat me so at other times, and in other ways, if he had the chance. You have treated me in the past as today you treated those people who glared at the magic egg. In the days gone by you made me see an unreal man, but you will never do it again! Good-bye."

"Edith," cried Loring, "you don't—"

But she had disappeared through a side door, and he never spoke to her again.

Walking home through the dimly lighted streets, Loring involuntarily spoke aloud:

"And this," he said, "is what came out of the magic egg!"

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14: These Things Pass

E. M. Delafield

(Edmée Elizabeth Monica Dashwood, 1890-1943)
The Royal Magazine, March 1928
Observer (Adelaide) 21 April 1928

Prolific novelist, best known for her "Provincial Lady" series. Also wrote plays and short stories, few of which have been collected, or reprinted.

UNFORTUNATE little Mary Merrion sat there— evidently feeling that she was the stupidest, as well as by far the youngest, person at the luncheon table. Lady Olivia could see her feeling that. If only the little thing could have realized how very little it mattered that she should be stupid, with that complexion and those blue eyes! As for her youthfulness— one could gauge the extent of it, by the mere fact that she so obviously looked upon it is a humiliating handicap.

The corners of Lady Olivia's hard, still handsome, mouth turned down slightly, in rather sardonic amusement She kept it strictly to herself, however, for she was a good hostess.

It was as a good hostess that she presently intended to give the conversation a fresh turn— but for the moment, there was nothing for it but to let those two very clever people, Mrs. Jayne and Sir Dennis Calthorp, continue to show how very clever they could be.

They were talking about love. A subject Lady Olivia thought, about which it is not difficult to be clever, since everybody knows that there is nothing new to be said about it, and therefore it is enough to say things that have been said before, in comparatively new phraseology.

Some one had propounded the old question-Which was the better thing-first love, or last love?

"The last love is the best love," said Sir Dennis, his musical actor's voice giving great charm to the words. "By the time one has reached the last love, all the moves of the game are known. One expects neither too much nor too little."

"First love is wonderful— but it hurts," agreed Mm. Jayne. "It's all to tragic, too, much inclined to try and plumb the depths of eternity in a teacup, so to speak. First love ends in disillusionment."

"So does last love, dear Fanny," gently said Sir Dennis. "The difference is that then one expects it."

Laughter rippled round the table.

Only little Mary Merrion's face was grave and rather doubtful, her blue eyes wide with perplexity.

It was too bad. She was only 18, and had been brought up in a convent. Lady Olivia remembered. Even nowadays, these Catholic girls emerged from school marvellously innocent and ignorant.

She wondered who the boy was— for it wasn't abstract belief in the sanctity of first love that had brought that rather pitiful expression of concern into Mary's baby face.

Perhaps later on Mary would tell her. It wasn't ever very difficult to win the confidence of 18— especially such a very old-fashioned, unsophisticated 18 as this. Lady Olivia's own daughters, both of them very brilliantly married, were extremely modern and sophisticated young women. They had never, at any age, displayed the innocent gaucherie of little Mary Merrion. Lady Olivia admitted frankly to herself that she'd have hated it if they had, but in this ridiculous child it rather attracted her.

When Lady Olivia followed the humblest of her guests from 'he dining room, leaving the men to the slightly over-heated, cigarette-scented room, the table, with its disorganized array of little gilt chocolate cobweb lace mats, eggshell china coffee cups, and silver ashtrays— she put a cool, friendly hand on the child's soft bare arm.

"You must tell your mother how glad I am that she let you come to-day. I'm afraid it's been dull for you-no one of your own age. We'll do better when you come down to Chaddock next month. You are coming, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes, thank you very much! I'm looking forward to it," stammered Mary. She blushed foolishly and adorably.

Not another woman in the room could have done it, reflected her hostess dispassionately. Either it wouldn't have shown through the rouge, or else their faces were already slightly glazed by too much food, eaten in a warm room.

As for her own ivory pallor, enhanced by powder. Lady Olivia knew well that it had ceased, many years ago, to register any change in her pulses.

For she was 58 years old.

She had always been of the world in which she lived, assimilating its values, and accepting them as her own.

She appraised Mary Merrion as she would have appraised any girl— at her marriageable value. Good family— no money— the drawback, from an English point of view, of Roman Catholicism— the assets of extreme prettiness, youth, and an evident absence of that dangerous quality, cleverness.

"No Catholic could afford her," reflected Lady Olivia. "They have to marry money, poor wretches. But for anybody with an income, she'd be a charming wife. I must get hold of a man for her, for the Chaddock party."

Chaddock was a small country house in the heart of the Bicester country. The Durand place, close by, had some years ago passed into the hands of Lady

Olivia's only son, and his American wife. Every year Lady Olivia entertained a house party for the hunt ball. She had invited Mary Merrion because of her old friendship with Sir Francis Merrion.

"Your father is a very old friend of mine," she said to the girl, trying to make her forget her shyness. "We used to know one another in the old days, when I went to dances in London. That was before he married your mother.

"Oh, what a long time ago!" said Mary very naively.

"Yes, wasn't it?" Lady Olivia returned, without a hint of the slightly sardonic amusement that she was feeling. What a child!

Really, the men for the Chaddock party would almost have to be selected with a view to their fitness for the society of anything so innocent, so utterly un-modern.

Lady Olivia had the conscience of her world: socially, she could be scrupulous.

She went to gee Mary Merrion's mother.

"Your girl is too sweet," she said graciously. "I'm so glad she's coming to Chaddock. Her first house-party, I suppose?".

"Not quite. She's been to one or two old Catholic friends— cousins and so on."

Lady Merrion was a shabby, harassed, musical creature, always dressed in black, who almost lived at the Brompton Oratory, and who would secretly have liked to see her daughter a nun.

Lady Olivia could place exactly the old-fashioned, impoverished Catholic houses, scattered over the north of England, in which Mary had stayed, with families all of them inter-related by marriage to one another.

"I see," she said smoothly."Such a good way of breaking the ice-though Heaven knows that girls don't require that nowadays."

"Mary is very shy."

"I saw that. Too adorable. It's simply a question of time before shyness comes in again, too. People are already getting sick of these debutantes who scream Sex at their first dance. It's been overdone."

"A convent education makes a girl different," said Lady Merrion.

"Of course. Most attractive. Now, do I tell me, Agnes, is there any one you'd specially like me to ask for her? The only Catholic I know who's the least use, is Terence O'Halloran, the Irish novelist. Quite brilliant, of course, but he has a good many invitations, and I may not be able to get him."

Lady Merrion looked frightened.

"I hear that his last book is very much disapproved of by the Church. He's supposed to have Modernist tendencies."

"My dear, surely Mary isn't only going to make friends that the Church approves of?"

"I'd much rather that she did," said Lady Merrion simply.

Lady Olivia's shaven eyebrows went up. "You realize, of course, that that attitude is going to reduce her chances of marriage quite desperately?"

"She'll anyhow have to marry a Catholic."

"That reduces them, still further."

"I know," said poor Lady Merrion, piteously. "But there's never been a mixed marriage in our family yet, and it would break her father's heart— and mine."

"What about Mary's heart?" said Lady Olivia shrewdly. "She may fall in love, you know."

"Poor little dear. I believe she thinks she's in love now. But it wouldn't do."

"It?"

"Geoffrey Poole. Arabella's boy. He's only 24 and hardly any money."

"A lovely old place."

"They say he'll never be able to afford to live there. In any case, they're both far too young."

"Well, she's so pretty she's certain to have other chances and much better ones. Has there ever been anything between them?"

"A little childish nonsense when they were both in Ireland last summer. He happened to be the first young man that Mary had ever known, that was all. And, of course, he is a Catholic."

"These things pass," said Lady Olivia smiling. "I'll see what I can do at Chaddock. You realize, though, that we're not 20 miles away from the Pooles? She'll meet him at the ball without a doubt."

"Well, it can't be helped," said Lady Merrion, with the vague philosophy of one whose real interests are elsewhere. "You'll take care of her, I know. It's so kind of you to have her."

Lady Olivia privately thought that it was kind, too. Girls, now that her own were married, were not in her line.

But if she wanted to have a successful party for the hunt ball— and none of her parties were ever anything else— she must have the right kind of girl.

Mary, pretty though she was, couldn't be called that. She was so shy, so young, and so silly, that a man would either fall in love with her straightway or else ignore her existence altogether.

Lady Olivia, taking no chances, added her own younger daughter, with her husband, to the party, since either could be trusted to talk amusingly, make love or be made love to, play almost all games just well enough, and dance tirelessly. She had two unattached men— Gervais Gilbertson, who was reputed

to be making money as a stockbroker, and Derek Mackenzie, a good-looking boy in the Foreign Office. To amuse Gilbertson she added Shelia Flower, who looked 22 and was close on 30, as dark as little Mary was fair, and as sophisticated as Mary was innocent.

The remaining guest at Chaddock was John Silverton, M.P., for a northern constituency, Lady Olivia's own contemporary, and perhaps the oldest and most intimate of her friends. She delegated to him, as she had done at all her parties for years past, the duties of host.

When the night of the hunt ball arrived the Chaddock house party had been assembled three days. The skill of Lady Olivia, of John Silverton, and the bold, dashing familiarity affected by Shelia Flower and the young married couple, had combined to produce the illusion that they all knew one another very well indeed.

Even little Mary Merrion giggled freely, and seemed to be enjoying herself.

Lady Olivia watching her, as she watched all those of her fellow creatures whom she noticed at all, saw that men were easily attracted to Mary, but that she could not hold their attention. She was not only inexperienced, but she obviously did not really care whether they admired her or not. ?

On the night of the hunt ball Lady Olivia understood why.

The Poole boy was there— a tall, good-looking youngster— and Mary, in blue tulle, blushed adorably, if idiotically, at the sight of him.

They danced together almost the whole evening. Lady Olivia, as usual had men to talk to her, and an occasional woman. John Silverton never deserted her for long, and she knew every hunting man in the room. But she had an eye on Mary Merrion, even while she amused Gen. Blake and a bald and sinister-looking elderly man called Keppel, with malicious and satirical stories of their mutual acquaintances. Presently Keppel asked her who was the pretty little girl in blue.

"Agnes Merrion's girl. She's just out."

"Is it a case of love at first sight I've been watching her and young Poole-he's never left her side."

"Oh, I believe they've met before. Agnes called it boy and girl nonsense."

"Why? Wouldn't it be quite a good thing? They're both Roman Catholics, aren't they?"

"No money."

"A pity ."

"They'll get over it," said Lady Olivia, shrugging her shoulders. "The more desperate it is now, the quicker it'll be finished."

"I suppose so," assented Keppel. "Well, I must try and persuade my wife to come home. She can't stand late hours."

"Here she is, looking wonderful, as usual," said Lady Olivia.

She smiled at Mrs.. Keppel, and they exchanged the informal intimacies of women who have known one another, and one another's families, for many years.

Lady Olivia collected her own party not very long afterwards. She noticed that while her own daughter, and Sheila Flower, masked possible fatigue with a sort of hard glitter, Mary looked more child-like than ever.

Her round face was deeply and warmly flushed, her blue eyes shone, her baby mouth drooped softly at the corners.

"Have you enjoyed it, Mary?"

"Oh, yes, I loved it!"

She actually repeated the same thing when Lady Olivia and she went upstairs.

"The other two had drifted to the smoking room with the men.

"I did love it, Lady Olivia. It was the nicest dance I've ever been to."

"First love, Mary?"

"Oh!" A startled pair of eyes met Lady Olivia's cold smile.

"How did you guess?'' faltered Mary.

"It wasn't very difficult. Do you two little children consider yourselves engaged?"

"We want to be, but papa and Mamma won't Jet me," said Mary, for all the world like the heroine of a Victorian novel. "I thought that perhaps-perhaps you'd help me. Papa would listen to anything you said."

IT WAS years since Lady Olivia had listened to such confidences. She had, indeed, supposed them to be as much out of date as nightly curling pins-and nearly as indecent.

"Come into my room, child," she said, and she dismissed her maid, and sat down by the fire, and allowed Mary Merrion to flop upon the white bearskin at her feet, although hoping that the girl would have enough sense not to lean against her knee, in the approved attitude of a stage ingénue.

"I'm very, very happy," said Mary earnestly, ' but I'm terribly miserable as well."

And she burst into excited tears.

"Well, well," said Lady Olivia, "what is it all about?" .

"Geoffrey and I— it's so difficult to explain, but it really and truly is the real thing," solemnly declared little Mary Merrion. "We shall neither of us ever care for anybody else. Until I knew Geoffrey, I never had the least idea that life

could be anything like this-and neither had he. It's the most wonderful thing that's ever happened. The whole world seems different now."

She paused, clasping her hands, her eyes rapt.

"Yes?" Lady Olivia encouraged her.

There was only one think left for Mary to say. and Lady Olivia felt perfectly certain that she was going to say it. She did.

"I should like everybody else to be as happy as I am. But it would .be impossible. Nobody could be. At least— if only we could get papa and mamma to consent! Geoffrey says his mother would, he knows."

"And what shall you do if yours won't?"

"We shall wait-years and years, if necessary. Neither of us could ever change. But I can't marry against their wishes— it would be wrong."

"You've been well brought up, Mary."

"I was brought up at the convent,"' said Mary simply, "But oh, Lady Olivia, if I mayn't be engaged to him, I think we ought to say good-bye. And if we do, II think it will break my heart."

Lady Olivia's mouth twitched very slightly. "What do you want me to do, child?"

"If you would only persuade papa and mamma to let us be engaged. They listen to what you say-everybody does. And you know Geoffrey's people, and everything, and after all, there is no reason why we shouldn't— one day— he's a Catholic and everything— it's only that we've neither of us got any money— and after all, what does money matter?" said Mary, with infinite scorn in her small, excited voice.

"It matters quite a lot— later on," Lady Olivia answered levelly. "But not to first love. Go to bed, little child, and don't fret. I'll go and see Mrs. Poole to-morrow, and perhaps when I've talked to her, I shall be able to write to your father."

"How good you are! Oh, you are an angel!"

"No, I'm not. Now run along."

Mary went, and her. eyes, between tears and radiance, and innocent infantile sleepiness, were more like stars than ever.

And Lady Olivia went to bed, not sleepy, since she only slept a few hours in every night, and not, truth to tell, much concerned with Mary Merrion's love affair.

She read part of a new novel by a celebrated and rather scandalous French writer, and then turned off the light. But she never forgot a promise, and the next morning she deputed John Silverton to look after her guests and went herself to call upon Geoffrey Poole's mother.

The visit confirmed her own view— that Geoffrey was an excellent young man, that his mother earnestly desired his happiness, wished him to marry a Catholic girl, thought Mary entirely charming, and was sufficiently unworldly, or sufficiently sentimental, to feel that, in comparison with her son's happiness, money mattered very little.

"Then it's only the Merrions," thought Lady Olivia, and she smiled. She could manage Sir Francis Merrion always— he had been harmlessly in love with her for years— and Agnes Merrion didn't really count. She wasn't sufficiently interested in questions of marrying and giving in marriage to set up any very determined opposition. It was only that Mary hadn't known how to manage them, poor little thing. Another type of daughter would have been formally engaged, with then full approval, to her Geoffrey by this time. Well, in another month's time, or less, Mary should be.

At the entrance to her own woods Lady Olivia stopped the car and got out, telling the chauffeur that she would walk the rest of the way. .

To be alone sometimes rested her, for most people were rather boring to her. Only men of intelligence greater than her own, such as John Silverton, really interested her, and types-there were few of them, indeed-that were actually new to her, like little Mary Merrion.

She walked slowly through the wintry woods. Almost automatically she noted where a tree had been felled, and where another one was marked for cutting down.

She knew the Chaddock woods so very well.

Presently she saw John Silverton coming through the trees towards her. She thought how wonderfully young he looked, in his delightfully shabby tweeds, and how well he had kept his figure.

John must be close on sixty now.

"I thought you'd send the car on by the new road and come through this way yourself," he said triumphantly. "See how well I know you, Olivia!"

"You do indeed, John. How nice of you to come arid meet me!"

They exchanged the quiet smile of complete and long-established intimacy.

"Well—" He turned to walk beside her. "Well, it will be all right. Dorothy Poole has only one idea-to see her boy happy. She says he's desperately in love, and she's only thankful the girl is a Catholic, and a lady. It only remains to persuade the Merrions."

"And that you'll easily do."

"Frankly, I know I shall. Francis is always amenable, and Agnes can be made so, if one goes the right way to work. I fancy she had it in mind that Dorothy Poole would object, and although she's a saint, she's terribly proud, and couldn't bear the idea of Mary coming into the family as a favour, so to speak."

"That little fairy damsel will have a lot to thank you for."

"Will she?" said Lady Olivia. "We shall know that in ten years' time, perhaps. But in the meanwhile, of course, the poor little thing will regard me as a fairy god love!"

"The last love is the best love, Olivia."

"That's what Dennis Calthorp says— you remember one day at lunch in Lower Seymour street?"

"I remember the discussion, yes. But no one went very much below the surface— naturally. It wasn't the time, or the place. And I remember, too, thinking that one day I must ask you what you thought about it."

"I think I gave my verdict in favour of first love— but I don't remember. These things— they all pass."

The man end the woman both fell silent, and followed the path, now increasingly narrow, that wound among the trunks of the Scotch firs, without speaking.

They were within a quarter of a mile of the Chaddock Lodge, when John Silverton pointed with his stick to a small, stone-built temple, built in a pretentious. style popular in the eighteen-fifties and earlier.

'What's the history of that, Olivia?"

"What— Oh, the Belvedere. Ridiculous place. I believe my father-in-law built it. I haven't been inside it for years."

"Let's look in."

"There's nothing to see."

But she turned off the path, across a few hundred yards of spongy moss and springing, bramble, and they. entered the little open stone building.

It was semi-circular, and a stone seat ran round one side of the inner wall.

heap of rotting leaves lay in one corner, and birds had fouled the tessellated paving of the floor and the empty niche that broke the line of the back wall. A faint smell of decay pervaded it all.

John Silverton and Lady Olivia looked round them a little vaguely.

At last the man spoke as though in answer to an unuttered thought, of which he took her cognisance for-granted.

"Yes, It's a sad little place, after all. It must be a long while since it was last used as a lovers' tryst."

"Thirty years, John," said Lady Olivia with a harsh laugh.

He swung round to look at her.

"Was it?"

She nodded. "Yes." .

"I'm sorry, my dear. I didn't know."

His kind, grave face had grown graver, but here wore its habitual air of cold arrogance.

"You needn't mind. Let's sit down for a few minutes. I'm not such a good walker as I used to be. No, John, you needn't mind."

"I didn't know." he repeated.

"You knew I'd had what melodramas call. I believe, a past?"

"I knew that a woman as beautiful as you, my dear and with a personality like yours, hadn't escaped tragedy."

"It wasn't that-though it's like you to put it that way. I don't know why I've never told you, John. I've told you so much else."

"I always want to know, Olivia."

"I know."

She looked at him-the man who had loved her faithfully for so many years, and to whom she had never given more than friendship.

"Women of my type have all their love affairs after marriage, as a rule," she said abruptly. "I did, of course. I was 22 when I came here, and of course standards were much stricter then than they are now. I can't imagine how I escaped a scandal, little fool that I was. Everybody knew that my husband was unfaithful to me. almost from the very first, and everybody must have been wondering how I was going to console myself. Well, I did after a fashion. Silly affairs, most or them, embarked upon for excitement, and vanity-but I always used to imagine that I loved the man, at the time. I was emotional in those days, John."

She paused for a moment, but Silverton said nothing.

"Well, I was 28 when I had the smashing, crashing love affair that one reads about and never believes in. We used to meet here. When I think of the risks I took! It was insane. My boy was five years old, and I hoped and thought, then, that he was going to be the only child. If it hadn't been for my child, I should have gone away with him. of course. As it was—"

She broke off with a shrug, and glanced dispassionately round the little temple.

"Almost every night, one summer, I used to come here. As far as I know no one ever found us out. He was more careful than I was, though. He had his position in the county to think of— and, of course, everybody knew us terribly well. We had to meet publicly almost every time either of us ever went anywhere. It lasted for three years."

"What ended it, Olivia?"

"He had to marry. His people gave him no peace about it. We'd always agreed that if he married it must stop. We said good-bye here, I remember."

Lady Olivia shuddered slightly and put her hand on the stone surface of the circular seat.

"I lay full length on the seat, face downwards, and cried till I couldn't see, after he'd gone," she said. "I remember that I felt I couldn't live through it. And it was after that I had a bad breakdown, and was sent abroad and when I came home we bought, the house in Lower Seymour Street, and weren't here so much."

"Did he marry?"

"He married. It turned out very well."

Lady Olivia rose. "Shall we go on? It isn't exactly warm here."

As they left the stone pavilion, walking slowly, she gave her small, cold laugh again.

"As I always say, these things pass. John, Of all that madness and misery and rapture, what's left? I've passed the Belvedere a thousand times, I suppose, in the last quarter of a century, and I've very, very seldom remembered.... I don't suppose I should have remembered now, if we hadn't been talking of first love, and those children."

"And the man?" asked Silverton in a low voice.

"For the past 30 years," said Lady Olivia, "—remember that it's 30 years, John— we've been neighbours. We meet often. I don't think he ever remembers. And I— well, I look at him— and at myself in the glass, sometimes— and it's only like a dream or another life. We are not the same people now, he and I. Nothing is left. We can't even visualize him, as he was then. Now he's grown very bald— and I'm nearly an old woman."

And with her mind's eye she saw the sinister-looking, elderly man called Keppel, with his delicate wife, of whom he took care, as she had seen him at the hunt ball the night before.

"Good heavens, the child is at the gate waiting for me. Isn't that Mary Merrion?"

"Yes, I'll leave you."

"I've nothing to tell her, except that it's going to be all right and that I've asked the young man to dinner to-night. Absurd! She'll catch her death of cold, standing there."

"First love—" quoth John Silverton, as he turned to leave her. But Lady Olivia smiled and raised her eyebrows.

"First love— or last love," she said. "These things pass—"

———————

15: The Fountain of Light

A. A. Irvine

(Andrew Alexander Irvine, 1871-1939)

The Strand Magazine April 1930

Australian Women's Weekly 20 Jan 1934

SHE was quite the prettiest girl that he had ever seen!

Michael Inscott, seated on a bright blue chair under a big orange umbrella at one of the little tables on the terrace of the Café de Paris, had no doubts about the matter. And then came a second satisfactory thought: she was staying at his hotel, so he would have every opportunity of making her acquaintance.

It was a typical April morning at Monte Carlo. Sunshine poured lavishly from a blue sky. To his left rose the great buff sugar-cake structure of the world-famous Casino; beyond it was visible a patch of azure sea. To his right lay a strip of the Casino gardens, bright green lawns studded with parterres of many-hued flowers; behind them a clustering mass of houses stretching away to a towering range of greyish rock sparsely covered with dark-green olive trees.

Through the spacious square in front of him there ebbed and flowed a constant stream of traffic: lordly cars bearing their plutocratic owners in search of refreshment and diversion towards Nice and Cannes, more commonplace vehicles laden with their less wealthy occupants bound for Mentone, or to view the glories of the Grande Corniche. Up and down the Casino steps surged the customary throng intent on purchasing tickets for the Russian Ballet, discussing the previous night's luck or disaster at the tables.

While he sat leisurely imbibing his iced *Martini sec* Inscott was feeling that the world was a very pleasant place to dwell in. For the past ten years he had borne in the fullest sense of the phrase, the burden and heat of the day as an officer of the Indian Police Service. The unexpected death of an uncle had suddenly put him in possession of a nice little property in England and an income comfortably adequate for its maintenance; so he had promptly bade farewell to the East. After his arrival in London there had followed a few days of stuffy interviews with an aged family solicitor; and then, forsaking the chilly murk of London he had hastened thankfully southwards in cheerful anticipation of his holiday. He had reached Monte Carlo the previous afternoon, and from the moment when he had first set eyes on Joan Varriner at dinner in the restaurant of the Hotel Majestique he had realised that his holiday was commencing auspiciously.

From behind the accommodating pages of the Continental edition of *The Daily Mail* he studied her closely. This morning she was dressed in soft grey: grey dress, hat, stockings and shoes. And, which was more important, she had grey eyes, chestnut hair, and a smiling oval face. There was about her an air of joyous freshness which made her conspicuous among the crowd of painted women seated around her.

Inscott's gaze rested with less favor upon her escort. A man of about his own age, so he judged; good-looking dark, with a small clipped moustache, rather too immaculately clad in a light tweed suit. Watching him, as he conversed animatedly with his fair companion, Inscott became aware of the feeling that there was something he did not like in the young man's expression. Somehow he did not look the sort of fellow whom one would care to make a pal of. A latent tweak of jealousy set him inwardly inquiring, who was the fellow? Was he the girl's husband or lover or merely an acquaintance?

To his disappointment she did not appear either at lunch or at dinner but he caught sight of her directly he entered the *Sal-les Privées* that evening at the Casino. She was standing alone by one of the roulette tables, a tall, slim figure in black with a knot of red carnations on one shoulder. For a time he watched her amuse herself punting with varying success on the even chances; and then, all at once as though impelled by a sudden impulse, she leaned forward and ventured a louis on number twenty. With a tantalising rattle the little ivory ball began to slow down wavered and fell into its destined compartment. Number twenty had won!

There occurred then one of those unpleasant little contretemps which occasionally disturb the serene atmosphere of the gaming-rooms. As the girl gleefully stretched out a hand to gather up the satisfactory pile of counters which a croupier was pushing across with his rake a stout swarthy dame seated in front of her shot forth a heavily be-ringed paw claiming that it was she who had staked on number twenty! The girl hesitated, her face flushed with surprise and annoyance, while a murmur, partly amused, partly indignant arose among the other players. Quite unabashed, the stout lady continued volubly to assert her claims, till Inscott, pushing his way forward, in very tolerable French addressed the *chef de partie* on his elevated seat in the centre of the table.

"Sir," he said, firmly but politely "madame is mistaken. It was this lady here"— he pointed to the girl— "whose stake was on that number."

There was a short discussion among the croupiers, and the winnings were handed over to their rightful owner. The chef, in an undertone, addressed a sharp remark to the stout lady, who, picking up her bag, departed violently protesting.

As play was resumed the girl turned to Inscott with a smile of gratitude.

"Thank you so much!" she said "It's so awkward when these things happen."

"Beastly!" he agreed "But that really was a bit too thick, wasn't it? We're in the same hotel, you know," he continued "My name's Inscott. You're Miss Varriner, aren't you?"

The girl nodded. "I am. How did you know?"

Inscott laughed frankly. "Oh, I'm no thought-reader! I looked you up in the hotel register. Tell me, what made you suddenly back that number?"

Joan answered him amusedly: "As good a reason as most gamblers have, I imagine. To-day's my twentieth birthday. Do you come here often?"

"I only arrived last night. I've not been long back from India."

"India?" Joan looked at him interestedly.

"Yes. Have you been out East too?"

"Only as a child. But dad spent many years in business in Calcutta, and still goes out there occasionally. He's joining me here as soon as he can leave London." She threw a questing glance round the other tables. "Do you happen to know Mr Ram?"

Her companion laughed again "India's full of Mr Rams." he replied. "Which one is this?"

"His name is really Lala Sita Ram— but I call him Mr. Ram for short. He's the private secretary of the Rajah of Kalankar."

Inscott's face expressed his surprise. "I know Lala Sita Ram well! I was in the Police in those parts, and often visited Kalankar State. But what is he doing in Monte Carlo?"

"Oh, there's no mystery about it. Like many Eastern potentates, the Rajah wished to pay a visit to Europe. He's taken a gorgeous villa near Nice for a month or two, and Mr. Ram has come on ahead to make all the arrangements."

"Splendid! I'll be glad to see him again! He's a good little chap— with a lot more stuff in him than the average Babu has."

Joan gave a gurgle of amusement. "His quaint Babu-English is too funny for words!" She pointed to a distant table. "Look! There he is— he's caught sight of you."

Lala Sita Ram, private secretary, came towards them, a dapper little figure in faultlessly-cut evening dress. Behind his enormous spectacles his beady eyes twinkled genially in his round, brown face.

"I am verree glad to see you, Mr. Inscott!" he exclaimed, holding out his hand. "And how are you, I ho-o-ope? Quite well, no doubt, eh? So you have made already acquaintance with this charming miss?"

"We're both at the Majestique," Inscott replied, shaking hands. "I hope you're fit, Lala Sahib? What news of His Highness the Rajah?"

"Revered master will arrive by later boat," explained the secretary, solemnly "You see, there has been un-fortunate hitch in His Highness's journey. At Cairo he attended ceremonious collation held by friends in his honor, and acquired a doloriferous belly-ache due to unripe melons." He turned courteously to Joan. "You will gratify me by imbibing liquid refreshment."

"No, please!— it's my shout!" Inscott protested. He led the way to the bar and called a waiter. "A cocktail, Miss Varriner? Orangeade?"

"Orangeade, please."

"And for me also." requested the secretary, "though since this morning I have been tempted to submerge domestic grief in stronger liquors!" He grinned ruefully

Inscott said, politely: "I'm sorry. What's wrong, Lala Sahib?"

The Lala Sahib hastened to explain.

"We Hindus, as you know, are always desiring a son. But this morning, at crowcock, I have received telegram from spouse in India informing me that I am become progenitor of a pair of twin female children of the opposite sex. This I am prone to regard as unprecedented catastrophe!" His cheerful twinkle returned again. "After all," he added, philosophically, "such events are on the knee of God, eh? Ergo, it is the part of a wiseacre to confront existence with a simper!... You have mentioned our business to Mr. Inscott?" he asked Joan.

The girl shook her head. "Not yet."

"Oh— but it will be quite safe to tell him," rejoined the secretary, earnestly. "Mr. Inscott was well-known Police official. In case of need he would be helpful."

"I'll tell him then," Joan decided. "Have you ever heard of the *Chash-ma-i-Nur*?" she asked.

" 'The Fountain of Light?' " Inscott answered, promptly. "The Kalankar State diamond? Rather? I've seen the Rajah wearing it at durbars."

The girl dropped her voice. "Well, it's here! In the hotel safe at the Majestique."

Inscott stared at her in amazement. 'Good Lord! Here? Why, how on earth—?"

"The explanation is quite simple. The Rajah wished to have the setting altered; so my father, who is an old friend of his, brought it back with him on one of his trips. The only other people who knew this were Mr. Ram and myself."

"Well?"

"Well, somehow or other, after it had been reset, the knowledge of its whereabouts leaked out. Just before I left England our house was burgled. Fortunately the 'Fountain' wasn't there. The police theory was that the burglary had been the work of a gang of international crooks "

"That's quite likely!"

"So when we learnt that the Rajah intended visiting the Riviera, we thought it best to bring it over here secretly."

"HOW did you get it across?"

Joan smiled. "I brought it myself!" she announced, calmly.

Inscott sat up with a jerk.

"You?" he cried. "My hat! But the risk—?"

Joan interrupted him a little stiffly. "Oh, I'm quite capable of looking after myself! Besides, we had talked it over and had come to the conclusion that no one would be in the least likely to suspect me. If you remember, the Cullinan diamond was sent home in an ordinary postal packet."

Inscott began, doubtfully: "That's true! But still—!"

"Well, anyway, it's now in the hotel safe with some of my own things in a quite ordinary case."

"The hotel people know nothing about it?"

"Nothing. And no one can get it out without my written order." She glanced towards the doorway. "Oh, here's Mr. Mackann!"

Joan rose and greeted the newcomer. "I'm quite ready to go," she said. "Mr. Inscott, let me introduce Mr. Mackann— also in our hotel."

The two men shook hands. Inscott recognising Joan's companion of the Café de Paris. Then, as Mackann helped the girl on with her cloak, she asked:—

"Any luck to-night?"

Mackann grumbled good-humoredly: "Couldn't do a thing! Tried them all: roulette, 'chimmy,' and *trente-et-quarante*. So I'm fed up with casinos! How about a sail to-morrow?"

Joan joyfully consented: "Oh, I should love it!... Mr. Mackann," she explained, for Inscott's benefit, "has a topping little yacht lying off Eze."

"I shall be delighted if you'll come, too?" Mackann civilly extended his invitation, as the party made their way out of the Rooms. "And how about you, Lala Sahib?"

The secretary excused himself. "Thank you verree much, but I am not of nautical nature. In fact, from youth upwards I have been fervent addict of terra firma!" So saying, he beamingly took his departure.

Discussing plans for the morrow, the two men escorted Joan back to the hotel, where she bade them good night. Mackann, likewise, on the plea of having letters to write, went off to his room.

It was still quite early, for Monte Carlo; and, not yet feeling inclined to turn in, Inscott settled himself in a comfortable chair in the lounge and rang for a whisky-and-soda. As he sat for a while smoking and idly scanning the pages of *L'Illustration*, his glance happened to rest on a man writing at a table in a far corner of the lounge— a burly individual dressed in a dark tweed suit, with a big hooked nose and short brown beard. He had the appearance of a foreigner; and, as Inscott looked at him, there grew in his mind the conviction that, somewhere or other, he had seen this man before— but without the beard. The upper portion of the face, the big nose, the eyes, set unusually close together, seemed to remind him of someone whom he had met in vastly different circumstances. Where could it have been? Ah, well, he couldn't remember.

Whilst he was still pondering the question, Mackann came down the stairs again and, without noticing him, crossed the dimly-lighted lounge to where the bearded man was sitting. He drew up a chair, and, for a space, the pair remained conversing earnestly in undertones.

At length Mackann rose to go. Catching sight of Inscott, he walked over to him, but declined with thanks his offer of a drink.

"I really am off to bed this time!" he affirmed. "After I'd got upstairs I remembered that there was a question I wanted to ask Drukoff about a company I'm interested in."

Inscott was knocking out his pipe. "Drukoff?" he repeated, meditatively. "That's his name, is it?"

"Yes. A Russian, of course. I've only met him here. He's a financier of sorts, and was speaking to me the other day about some shares I purchased recently."

"It's funny!" Inscott went on. "But just before you came down I'd been wondering whether I'd already met him somewhere. Do you know whether he's ever been out East?"

Mackann looked at him sharply "Not that I know of. Oh, wait a minute, though— I think he did once say something about having visited Burma. Business connected with ruby mines, I believe."

Inscott finished up his drink. "Burma? Ah, that wasn't my part of the world. Well-good night."

DURING the next few days time passed pleasantly. There was more than one excursion on Mackann's trim little yacht, the *Sparhawk*, and, much to his relief, Inscott quickly realised that the *Sparhawk*'s owner was in no way his rival!

For it had not taken him long to discover that he had fallen in love with Joan Varriner. She was such a dear!— so absolutely splendid! He had always looked forward to some day settling down in a home of his own; and, now that Fortune had favored him, there was no reason why he should not ask her to marry him. True, he had had no real indication of her feelings; but he could not help thinking that she seemed to appreciate his company!

He hired a car, which he drove himself, and they visited many of the places of interest round about, revelling in the brilliant Riviera sunshine and the glories of blue sky and bluer sea. There were drives to the Old-world village of Roquebrune; to Grasse, the "city of perfumes"; and a wonderful lunch *chez* Caramello at Cap Ferrat, where the weird little proprietor, in huge horn glasses, skipped about the rooms concocting with his own hands marvellous dishes and burning liqueurs of all colors, according to methods of his own, to accompany each gastronomic creation.

Of Lala Sita Ram they saw but little. He was very busy with his preparations at the villa. Now and again they met him at the Casino, whither he repaired after the day's labors to risk, as he quaintly phrased it, "hard-earned increment on a board of green cloth." And there, one evening, he informed them of the Rajah's approaching arrival.

"You'll both be glad when he's here!" Inscott commented. "It's no joke being responsible for the safety of a gem like the *Chashma-i-Nur*! So far, I consider you've been very lucky!"

"We have!" Joan admitted "And I shall be thankful when it has been safely handed over. The Rajah will have his own guards at the villa. At the same time, it looks as though the crooks had quite lost track. If they mean to do anything, they'll have to be quick about it!"

AS often happens, the very next night something occurred that disturbed her pleasant feeling of security.

Inscott had driven Joan over to Nice to see the new Luxury-Casino. They dined there, and after dinner spent an hour or two in the Rooms watching the motley crowd collected from all quarters of the globe. At one of the baccarat tables an aged French Marquise, *grande dame* from the crown of her marvellously-coiffured white head to the soles of her gold-brocade shoes, was losing, with an expressionless face that seemed carved out of old ivory, the last of her chateaux. At another a world-famous dancer was winning a fortune at trente-et-quarante, the great mauve plaques, each worth a hundred pounds, alighting on the table with an opulent thump, as she tossed them carelessly on to red or black.

In order to avoid the traffic on a road which is never too safe, they left it before midnight on their homeward journey. For the next hour or so their route would be more or less deserted, until Monte Carlo commenced to empty of its horde of revellers.

They were halfway to Villefranche, rounding carefully in the darkness the innumerable corners of the road below the cliffs, when, from some distance ahead of them, there came the dull sound of a crash. This was followed, a few seconds later, by a shout, a sharp report, a yell as of someone in pain, and then again all was silence.

Inscott, shouting in reply, trod on the gas and took the corners recklessly.

"There's been a bad smash, without a doubt!" he said to his companion. "We must get along and see whether they need help."

"Didn't you hear a shot?" Joan asked.

"It sounded like it," he agreed. "But it may have been only a tyre-burst We shall know in a minute."

A few more winding turns and they could see what had happened. At the side of the roadway was a large saloon car, which had crashed at an angle into the cliff wall. Halted alongside it was a second car, which, before they could reach the spot, was restarted and callously driven away.

"The dirty brutes!" Inscott ejaculated, angrily, as he drew up close to the derelict. "Clearing off like that to avoid being spotted!"

Joan was peering through the window into the gloom.

"There's someone lying near the car." she said. "Two men, I think. I saw one of them move."

Inscott sprang out, carrying an electric torch. "There's a brandy-flask and a first-aid packet in that left side pocket," he directed. "Bring them along, will you?"

One of the prone figures, dressed in a chauffeur's uniform, rolled over, scrambled unsteadily to its feet, and stood dizzily swaying, its hand on the car bonnet. Inscott knelt down and flashed the torch on to the face of the motionless form lying behind the rear wheels. Then he called to Joan, his voice harsh with anxiety.

"Good God! It's Lala Sita Ram!"

Joan gave a little cry of dismay. "Oh!— he's— he's not dead?"

Her companion reassured her. "No— he's breathing. A nasty crack on the head, though. I'll give him some brandy."

After a few minutes, to their intense relief, the Indian sat up and looked about him. Except for a bump on his skull, he did not appear to be much the worse for his adventure. Joan could not help being amused when he began to speak; even in this time of stress his luxuriant verbosity had not deserted him!

"You are a friend in need and god out of a machine, Inscott!" he exclaimed, gratefully, rubbing the back of his head. "This is rotten bad business, eh? But for devilish thick occiput, I should have been now in Abraham's bosom!"

Inscott made up his mind what to do. "We'll take you and your chauffeur straight back with us," he said. "The hotel will fix you both up for the night, and you can tell us how it happened."

The secretary's story was brief. He had been driving back from Monte Carlo towards Nice, when a car had suddenly emerged from a small tunnel ahead and, notwithstanding their shouts, had deliberately borne down upon them, edging them into the cliff side. This had been most skilfully done, though at the moment they had judged it to be the act of a drunken driver. Directly their own car had struck the rock, the other car had been stopped, and two men, their heads almost entirely swathed in cloths, had jumped out of her and rushed at them with iron bars.

"And the shot?" Inscott queried.

"Oh, that was own personal handiwork!" acknowledged the little secretary, proudly. "I must tell you I am by nature a very fearful man! But this was clearly a case of doing and dying, so I shouted and discharged lethal weapon at a haphazard into the brown!"

Inscott clapped him admiringly upon the shoulder. "Good man! Do you think you hit either of them?"

"I am thinking so— for there was most dolorific hullabaloo from the bigger robber. But then I received calamitous blow upon occiput, and do not exactly remember."

DURING the remainder of the drive home Inscott was pondering deeply.

"The two men may have been mere ordinary robbers," he remarked. "Such cases are not uncommon here— road bandits holding up people for their Casino winnings. However, in the circumstances, I'm inclined to doubt this. It seems more likely that they had got wind of the Rajah's coming, and deliberately made an opportunity to search you in case you chanced to be carrying the diamond."

Lala Sita Ram nodded gravely.

"That also is own personal opinion," he agreed.

Next morning, after breakfast, Inscott sat reading a newspaper in the lounge. Lala Sita Ram had left early with the chauffeur to report to the police and to arrange for salvaging the damaged car.

With the object of avoiding the endless inquiries so dear to the hearts of Continental jacks-in-office, it had been resolved only to report the affair as a car accident, to say nothing about the pair of bandits.

This decision had been come to partly in accordance with the advice proffered by Mackann. He had been very sympathetic, but had enlarged on the trouble entailed by such inquiries, especially in view of the fact that the secretary had admittedly fired a revolver. Moreover, he surmised, the robbers by now were, in all probability, far over the frontier into Italy. They had obviously been after the Lala Sahib's Casino winnings. With this well-intentioned advice he had departed, taking Joan, who was none the worse for her night's experience, for a sail.

Inscott finished reading his newspaper, lighted a cigarette, and looked at his watch. There was time for a stroll on the terrace before *dejeuner*. As he crossed the lounge, Drukoff emerged from the lift, and, with the aid of a stick, hobbled stiffly across to a writing-table. His face was very pale, and he uttered a grunt of pain as he subsided into a chair, drew out a pocket-book, and began turning over its pages. Inscott casually questioned the lift-attendant, who was quite ready to impart his information. Monsieur, he understood, had slipped on the polished floor of his bedroom and had twisted his knee.

With a cursory glance at the bearded figure huddled in the armchair, Inscott passed through the swing-door into the street.

Then, through some trick of memory, there flashed suddenly into his mind recollection! He knew now where it was that he had once before seen this man who was calling himself Drukoff! In spite of the beard he wore, that unusually large nose and the ruthless, shifty eyes set too close together were unmistakable!

In a quiet corner of the sunlit Casino terrace he sat down to consider the problem raised by his discovery. Back to his memory there came a scene of some two years before. He visualised again the stifling hot court of a Calcutta magistrate, the motley crowd of native litigants and white-clad officials. A case was dawdling to its close. In the dock were two men, a European and a Chinese, the accused in a matter of cocaine smuggling, with a white girl implicated as the go-between. The Chinese had been convicted and sentenced. The European, with the help of a clever lawyer, had gone free. And the European, without a shadow of doubt, had been the individual now calling himself Drukoff. In court his name had been given as Kallin— no. Karrin, that was it!

And here was this bad hat in Monte Carlo, posing as a financier at a time when a priceless jewel, brought over from an Indian State in the vicinity of Calcutta, was reposing in the hotel safe of the Majestique. There had been one

attempt made in England to steal it; there had been the previous night's hold-up of the Rajah's secretary; and this very morning the aforesaid bad hat had come limping into the lounge with a story of having twisted his knee in his bedroom! Of course, as the ex-Police officer frankly admitted to himself, there might be nothing whatever in the theory forming in his mind— but there was certainly a queer look about the affair. Drukoff, or whatever his true name was, might be worth watching!

But, assuming for argument's sake that he was the man injured by the secretary's random shot, who could the second bandit have been? Drukoff, so far as Inscott was aware, kept very much to himself, and appeared to have no acquaintances in the hotel, with the exception of Mackann. There was not the slightest ground for suspecting Mackann; he seemed to be a pleasant, perfectly respectable fellow, with not too many brains, a yacht and plenty of money. Still, there were many brands of international crooks— one never knew! It might be worth while to sound him further as to Drukoff's antecedents. Thank goodness within a day or two, that infernal *Chashma-i-Nur* would be in its owner's keeping, and Joan would be relieved of further responsibility and risk! In a rather perturbed state of mind Inscott walked back to the hotel for dejeuner.

IT was shortly after nine o'clock that evening when Lala Sita Ram's urgent message brought him hurrying down from his room.

He sensed immediately that there was something seriously amiss. The Indian's beaming smile was lacking; his face was drawn and lined with anxiety.

"Where is Miss Varriner?" he whispered, apprehensively, as his friend led him to a quiet part of a lounge and offered him a cigarette.

Inscott answered promptly: "At Lady Gradyn's, I suppose. She went there directly after dinner. We had intended dropping into the Rooms, but while we were dining a phone message came asking her to go to Lady Gradyn's villa and make a four at bridge. A car came for her a little while afterwards."

The secretary's countenance became even more worried. "But she is not there—!" he began. He let the unlighted cigarette fall from his fingers.

"For some reason she may have left there early?" his companion suggested.

"No. She has not been there at all, Mr. Inscott. That is the trouble. As soon as I reached the hotel, ten minutes ago. I rang up the villa on purpose to know. They had not seen anything of her."

Inscott's face had grown equally grave. "What made you telephone?" he asked.

"Since last night I have been uneasy," replied the secretary. "The time was getting so short. I felt that our enemies might do something— to get the Miss Sahiba into their power—" He broke off in evident distress.

"You really think—?"

The secretary made a gesture of helplessness. "I do not know what to think. Only— I am verree afraid!"

For a few moments Inscott remained silent, absorbed in thought. Then, with a plan of action forming in his mind, he briefly gave his companion his reason for suspecting the Russian. "There is one thing we must do at once," he concluded. "We'll go straight up to Drukoff's room and tackle him. If he knows anything, we'll drag it out of him. If he doesn't, well, at any rate, he dare not make a fuss, if I remind him of that little episode which took place two years ago in Calcutta."

At the bureau they learnt that the Russian was upstairs packing. He had given notice that he would be leaving the hotel the following morning.

His room was on the third floor, and, declining the services of the lift attendant, they quickly made their way up the staircase. Inscott knocked on the door, a gruff voice speaking in French bade them enter, and he walked in, followed by the secretary, closing the door behind him.

Drukoff, surrounded by his baggage was standing by the bedside packing a portmanteau. He whipped round and stared at his visitors in astonishment, mingled with alarm.

Speaking English, he demanded angrily "What is the meaning of this?'

Inscott came closer. "You've got to answer a question or two," he bluntly announced, his gaze riveted on the close-set, shifty eyes of the man in front of him. "Where's Miss Varriner?" he suddenly rapped out.

There was the least possible hesitation, and then the Russian blurted out indignantly: "I know not of whom you speak. And I ask, why have you come here?"

Inscott persisted: "You won't tell us? Then answer another question. Why are you calling yourself Drukoff?"

"Because that is my name!"

"That's a lie! Your name's Karrin! Two years ago you narrowly escaped conviction in Calcutta. There's no use your denying it. Question number three: How did you damage your leg?"

Pale with wrath, the Russian retorted savagely: "Why should I answer your questions? How is it your business? I slipped—"

"Oh, you slipped, did you? Shall I tell you what you were doing last night? You helped to hold up a car and got shot in the leg by an automatic—"

The Russian broke in vehemently: "I tell you, I know not of what you speak! But this is an outrage! I will call the manager!"

He stretched out a hand to press the bell-knob, but Inscott intercepted him and seized his arm with a grip of steel.

"You'd better see reason!" he threatened, as Drukoff struggled in his grasp. "Luckily for you we don't want the lady dragged into a scandal, if we can prevent it. But that's your only chance. Now— where's Miss Varriner?"

Beside himself with fury, the Russian contrived to wrench himself free and struck his captor across the face. He was a big man, but almost before he could realise what was happening he was pinned down backwards across the bed, and Inscott was grinding his knuckles into the fleshy, bearded throat.

Gradually the Russian's struggles became weaker. His breath came in labored spasms and his eye-balls were starting from his head.

"Let— let me go!" he managed to gasp out. "I'll— I'll tell you!"

The grip on his throat loosened, and he sat up groaning on the bed, his pale face twisted with venomous fury.

"She's— she's on Mackann's yacht," he confessed.

Inscott burst out: "My God— if you've harmed her!" He flung the man off and turned to his companion. "Come along. Sita Ram! We've no time to waste!"

Sending the secretary to give orders that the car would be wanted immediately, he hastened to his own quarters to make his arrangements. These were somewhat peculiar. Shedding his evening clothes, he attired himself speedily in a bathing suit, a thick tweed coat and trousers, and an overcoat. In an india-rubber sponge-bag he rolled up tightly an automatic pistol and dropped it into one of his pockets. Then he rejoined his companion below.

A minute or two later the car sped through the brightly illuminated Casino square, and slid down-hill towards the twinkling lights of the Condamine on the road to Eze.

Inscott remarked with grim satisfaction: "We've spiked Drukoff's guns! We sha'n't see him again!"

The Indian's eyes twinkled behind his glasses. "No—you are right! He is even now, I think, like a rat leaving a stinking ship! But what to do next, Mr. Inscott?"

Inscott's jaw was set firm. "Somehow or other, I'm going aboard the yacht! Can you pull an oar, Lala Sahib?"

"Yes, I can do that," Lala Sita Ram answered, confidently, "though I would not boast myself up to form of 'Varsity boat-race. However, Rajah Sahib's dominions include river, and I have sported thereon."

"Good! We'll take one of the small fishing-boats down by the shore ."

ON reaching Eze, the car was run into a nearby garage, and the two men crossed the railway line and made their way to the beach. There was no one about. It was a cloudy night, and they could see, a short distance away, the riding light of the *Sparhawk* swaying up and down in the darkness.

They selected a small boat lying close to the water's edge, set her noiselessly afloat, and pushed off. Telling his companion to take the oars and pull the boat gently in the direction of the yacht, Inscott climbed forward into the bows and commenced to divest himself of his outer garments.

There came no hail as, slowly, they crept forward. The crew were evidently absent or below. A cable's length from the yacht, Inscott, with a whispered injunction to his colleague to keep the boat within range, lowered himself over the side into the uncomfortably cold water. The rubber bag containing the automatic he gripped between his teeth.

A few dozen strokes brought him alongside the yacht, and he worked his way round her, seeking some means of getting on board. Finally he used the mooring rope, drawing himself up hand over hand until he reached the deck.

His advent remained unnoticed. With infinite caution he crawled to where a faint glow of light shone through the open deck windows of the tiny cabin. Raising his head a little, he peered downwards.

Within arm's reach of him Joan was standing, tensely erect, fronting with a look of mingled contempt and anger the man leaning with his back against the cabin door.

Mackann began speaking, the tone of his voice conveying a mixture of threat and persuasion.

"Just your signature to that bit of paper on the table, Miss Varriner. That's all! You'll have to do it you know; so why make a fuss?"

Then came Joan's answer, full of indignant scorn: "I won't give it! I've told you so already!"

Mackann laughed sneeringly. "I think you'll change your mind! That is, unless you wish to stay here with me indefinitely?" He tried persuasion again. "Come! Be sensible! No one will blame you; you can't help your-self. But if you won't sign—" He broke off, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Well?"

He laughed again. "Well—we might take a little run across to Corsica and put you ashore there! I've given my men the evening off, but they'll be back very soon."

"Do you imagine the hotel people won't make inquiries?" Joan demanded.

"About you? Oh, yes-to-morrow, I dare say! But that will be rather late! As for myself, they're quite accustomed to my occasional absences on the yacht!"

"And you really believe that the hotel clerk will hand you over the diamond?"

Mackann answered without hesitation: "Certainly! On the strength of your written signature. That absolutely safeguards him, you see! And he's being very highly paid!"

Joan's voice rang out: "You devil! Stand away from that door! I won't do it! Nothing will induce me to sign!"

"Well see about that!" He took a pace towards her. At the same instant the sharp command came from above him:

"Don't move, Mackann! I've got you covered!"

He checked and stared upwards in furious consternation, as Joan uttered a cry of joy. Through the cabin window there protruded a hand grasping an automatic. Behind it he could see the face of the speaker, who crouched on the deck glaring down at him.

He shrank involuntarily sideways, and the order came again: "Damn you! Didn't you hear? Don't move— or I'll shoot!"

Inscott continued quietly: "Take the pistol, please, Joan, I'm coming down. If he lifts so much as a finger, shoot him!"

Joan snatched the automatic which he passed to her through the window.

"I'll shoot!" she promised with vicious satisfaction.

Dripping wet, but exultant. Inscott ran down the narrow hatchway and entered the cabin. He looked round him, and opened a door leading into a small pantry.

"Too good a berth for a swine!" he commented. "But it will serve." He turned and addressed the white-faced scoundrel:

"Get in there!"

Without a word, Mackann obeyed him. Inscott banged-to the door and locked it.

"I'll leave you on guard," he told Joan, cheerfully, "while I have a rub down and help myself to one of the blighter's suits. Nothing like spoiling the Egyptians!"

A FEW minutes later they stood together on the deck. Inscott's hail brought Lala Sita Ram manoeuvring alongside. His welcome of them was characteristic.

"This, in my opinion, is true paladinical rescue of distressing damsel!" he exclaimed, gleefully. "As for Drukoff and Co., they are learning that as they have buttered their bread, so they must lie on it!"

Seated close to Joan in the stern, Inscott heard her tale, which was simple enough in its details. A bogus invitation to make a four at bridge; a sudden whiff of something squirted into her face, when the driver of the car pretended that a tyre had punctured; and then she had known no more until she had found herself in the cabin on board the yacht.

"You were absolutely splendid!" In-scott assured her; and there was a great deal more than mere admiration in the tone of his voice.

"Ah! but if you hadn't come!" Joan murmured, softly. "I don't know how I can ever thank you enough!"

Inscott laughed and put his fate to the test. "I can tell you that!" he whispered. "Joan! Joan, darling! mayn't I look after you always?"

His arm went round her, and she did not draw away. He glanced at the little secretary toiling manfully at the oars, whose head was screwed round measuring the distance to the shore.

Then, under cover of the darkness, he found Joan's lips.

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16: A Test of Humanity

J. J. Bell

(John Joy Bell, 1871-1934)

The Strand Magazine April 1930
Australian Women's Weekly 27 Jan 1934

AT a corner table in the dining-room of the Toilers' Club— not its real name, by the way— five young men were lingering, as they usually lingered, over their coffee, cigarettes, and after-lunch chat. They had been discussing the case of a person of aristocratic and affluent bearing who, having dined in one of London's most epicurean and expensive restaurants, and done himself extremely well, had not only calmly declared his inability to pay one penny, but had coolly criticised the entree which happened to be the chef's masterpiece and the *maitre d'hotel*'s chief pride on the carte of ten score carnal delights.

"I have always held that the brass of impudence is, on the whole, a richer worldly asset than the pure gold of honesty; and the fact that punishment followed this particular exploit does nothing to weaken my conviction. At all events, this cheerful knave got what he set out to get— an excellent dinner in luxurious and pompous circumstances— and I do not doubt that his rare sense of humor did much to lighten the subsequent hours of confinement."

The speaker, a journalist, who spoke better than he wrote, gently tweaked the point of his long nose— a habit indulged in after the utterance of a saying pleasing to his own ears— put a fresh cigarette between his somewhat sardonic lips and, from his accustomed place at the end of the table, surveyed with mocking eyes the faces of his companions.

"I dare say you're about right, Heldon," said one of them, while two others nodded.

"I'm afraid I don't agree," mildly said the fourth, who looked the junior of the group, and who wore large round glasses on his ingenuous, otherwise nondescript, countenance— an oddly attractive young countenance, nevertheless; one that would have suggested the word "gentleman," though its owner were standing in rags, at the pavement's edge. "I regard the brazen person as a contemptible ass!"

"Contemptible, if you like, old chap," the man opposite remarked, "but hardly an ass. He gets away with it oftener than not."

"Of course he does," Heldon put in."But proceed with your narrative, Billy."

"Ethics apart, Heldon, he is an ass," replied Billy, "because, oftener than not, he dives into a difficulty which he might have avoided— as witness your hero of the restaurant episode, who simply asked for trouble instead of appealing for help."

"I don't quite see what you're driving at. To whom was he to appeal?"

"To Humanity! But your brazen person is so puffed up with conceit of his own impudence that he overlooks the good-nature of his modest fellows. In deceiving others he is deceiving him-self. Had your hero possessed the most elementary knowledge of human nature, he would have had a very fair chance of leaving the restaurant a free man, his bill paid, and with, possibly, some small change in his pocket!"

"You're talking through your hat, Billy," said the man on his right, "if you mean us to infer that the other diners would have flocked to his rescue!"

"I don't mean anything so prodigious, Andy; but I do venture to say that somebody in the crowd, seeing a fellow-being in such distressful embarrassment as your hero, if he had had brains, would have pretended to be— I do venture to say that somebody in the crowd would have had the natural goodness and moral courage to get up and risk a pound!"

"Three cheers for Humanity!" said the man opposite. "And let us, as a mark of esteem, present our dear young idealist with a glass of Club port!"

"Thanks!" replied Billy; "but I'm working this afternoon. All the same, you fellows, I believe what I've just said. Humanity is a finer thing than you seem willing to admit."

"Our Billy," observed Heldon, with a dry grin, "is still obsessed by the memory of that pretty girl in the bus, who supplied the old gentleman in distressful embarrassment with tuppence for his fare. Personally, I have no doubt that there was a good deal of brass behind the ancient whiskers; but ever since then— five years ago, wasn't it?— Billy has been living in an atmosphere of benevolence!"

Billy took the laugh good-humoredly, saying, "You fellows are not the cynics you pretend to be. Your experience of Humanity, Heldon, has not been quite so rotten as your chaff would suggest."

"I confess that my experience has not included," Heldon answered, "a visit to a swell restaurant, with a hearty appetite and penniless pockets. But no more has yours, Billy, and, somehow. I don't think it ever will, though I should love to see you, having dined on the best, looking about for a kind face!"

"I really do think," said the man called Andy, "that it's up to Billy to illustrate his noble words on Humanity."

"That's an idea!" cried the man who had not previously spoken. "Billy, I'm willing to bet that you don't do it."

"Do what?"

"Walk into a restaurant, without a bean on you, dine, and wine, and— get Humanity to pay your bill!"

It must be recorded that Billy looked blank. Then, at the laughter of his friends, the red ran up his face and his kindly brown eyes behind the round lenses blinked a little angrily.

"Nothing doing," said Heldon, with a wink. "Recant, Billy, recant!"

"I'll do nothing of the sort." Billy said, suddenly, throwing up his head. "I admit," he went on, recovering his amiable tone and manner. "I admit that Andy took me aback just now; but I'm ready to play up to my belief. You can leave out the applause. Let me think for a minute."

"Think twice, beloved lunatic!" muttered Heldon. "We'd hate to have to bail you out."

"Shut up!" said Billy, pleasantly. "I'll confound you all before I've finished. After all, I think I'll take that glass of Club port." And he held his peace till it was set before him. Then:

"Yes, you fellows, I'll do it!"

"When?" they exclaimed as one man.

"To-night!"

"This is magnificent!" said Heldon, raising his glass. "Sir, we salute you! Later, we shall gather here again to await your S.O.S."

"I shall ask you to do so, in order that you may be disappointed," re-turned Billy. "Now listen! At eight o'clock to-night I shall enter the Planet grill-room— I happen to know that the Planet stamps 'Paid' on its bills— also it is pretty costly— and treat myself to the best, for which you fellows shall eventually pay. You shall also pay, each of you, a guinea to the Benevolent Fund of this club. I think that's all, except that, at seven-thirty, two of you may come to my rooms and satisfy yourselves that I set out penniless and carrying no article of the slightest value. Oh, there's one other point. I pledge myself not to take assistance from any person known to me, should such a person be in the restaurant."

"Good enough!" commented Heldon. "Still, if one may refer to the darker side, what do you stand to lose?"

"The price, eventually, of my dinner, plus five guineas to the Benevolent Fund."

"I say, you're pretty sure of your-self— aren't you?"

"I'm pretty sure of Humanity!"

WE may believe that he was still "pretty sure" when, spruce and debonair, he stepped into the grill-room, almost on the stroke of the hour. If Billy was a simpleton, he carried his simplicity rather grandly, as his two friends, who, at his own request, had "searched" him and then accompanied him to the portals of the Planet, were willing to admit.

"I shouldn't be too sorry if he pulled it off," said the one, as they proceeded towards the club.

"Nor I," the other agreed; "but, even with that honest boyish face of his, he hasn't an earthly. As Heldon remarked to me, after lunch, there can't be many people in London who haven't read the little tale of brazen impudence we were discussing to-day. It was in every paper. Some papers featured it. I'd be surprised to learn that there is anyone in the grill-room to-night who hasn't read it, and I think we may assume that poor Billy's 'distressful embarrassment' will receive the stony stare, without fail."

Since Billy was no profound psychologist, but merely an ordinary young man, who earned quite a decent living by writing more or less sentimental stories, with the happiest of endings, we may suspect that his faith in Humanity was of the heart, rather than the head; and it need not mean a reflection on his sincerity if we suspect also that, to some extent, at least, his confidence was, in the present adventure, sustained by the knowledge that, in the incredible event of Humanity failing him, his friends would swiftly respond to a telephonic S.O.S. At the same time, we may believe that Humanity's failure to rise to his ideals would hurt him more than the temporary awkwardness in which that failure would involve him.

The great grill-room of the Planet is L-shaped. and its least desirable table is, to most, patrons, a small one situated just off the corner. Seated at this table, the normal person experiences what may be termed an unrestful sensation of publicity; the pleasure of seeing is more than balanced by the discomfort of being seen by a fairly large number of people, from nearly all points of the compass. But whatever Billy himself might have desired, his scheme demanded that he should be seen at fairly close quarters by as many persons as possible, and his usher in the frock coat was mildly astonished when he chose the table off the corner.

"You dine alone, sir? Yes? Very good, sir." And the usher instructed the waiter accordingly, for it is one of the admirable features of the Planet that in no circumstances is a patron, once he is seated, asked to share the table, if he expresses a wish for solitude.

When Billy had ordered his dinner— a modest enough one, after all, considering that his friends would eventually pay for it— he lit a cigarette and proceeded to look about him. Early diners, with theatre engagements, were departing. Their places were being rapidly filled by newcomers, most of whom would put in a leisurely couple of hours. It was the newcomers who interested Billy. Sooner or later, he assured himself, one at least of them would justify his faith in Humanity's generosity of spirit.

Here it may be remarked that Billy was not unmindful of Humanity's little frailties. He recognised that there was a time for everything, and was willing to give Humanity every chance. In other words, he had planned to make his silent yet poignant appeal, which would be Humanity's opportunity, at the time when Humanity, as represented in his vicinity, was feeling at its best; namely, in the pleasant period of repletion between nine-thirty and ten.

Having finished his cigarette, he calculated that at the tables in his neighborhood were at least 22 persons who could not fail, when the hour came, to observe his "distressful embarrassment"; while near at hand was a table, reserved, its two chairs as yet unoccupied. Optimist though he was, yet worldly-wise enough to budget for the difference made by a good dinner, he did not seek to delude himself into regarding all the 22 persons as possible rescuers. Several of the faces, indeed, quite definitely forbade hope; but there were five men— he had no wish to be rescued by a woman— whose looks were most encouraging, and one whose countenance would have removed the last vestige of real doubt.

This countenance simply radiated geniality and human kindness— what matter if it seemed to speak also of high living, rather than lofty thoughts?— and its owner, a gentleman of middle-age, medium height, and considerable rotundity, sat solitary at the table immediately on Billy's right.

"You're the man for me!" thought Billy, and in the same moment of up-lift summoned the hovering wine waiter, and commanded a pint of Pol Roger, the rotund gentleman having already started on a quart of that justly esteemed champagne.

Now Billy was not even a moderate drinker. He seldom took anything alcoholic; and the wine presently set before him had been ordered on an impulse, but before he could regret it, his thoughts were whipped away, not only from the product of M. Roger, but from Mr. Benevolence, on his right.

Billy had prepared himself for certain emergencies, but not for a girl like this. She came in with an elderly lady of severe aspect to the reserved table, and seated herself in such a position that had Billy been taking a

snapshot he would have got what photographers call a three-quarter face. And a very charming picture it would have been. Dusky hair, dark grey eyes, short, straight nose, sweetly-proud mouth, softly curved chin— Billy, who had had his little affairs, forgot the lamest of them, noted those features and other delicious details, and said to himself: "The loveliest girl in the world!" And his heart rose rejoicing in the pure pleasure of her loveliness, only to fall dismayed at the thought of himself in his present position; for, most certainly, it had never occurred to him that he might have to exhibit his "distressful embarrassment" before eyes like hers!

WITHOUT delay, it may be stated that Billy did not enjoy the elegant, though simple, little dinner which came in leisurely relays before him. He may have appeared to enjoy the champagne. He certainly felt the need of its sparkling cheer, and probably being unused to it, derived not a little comfort, and possibly some extra courage, from it. But dinner or no dinner, wine or no wine, girl or no girl, Billy would not have faltered in his folly. He was not built that way. Once embarked on a venture, he was bound to go through with it. So he did his best— which was not very good— to refrain from glancing at the girl, and sought to concentrate, as it were on his right-hand neighbor, who now, looking more generous than ever, was brightly and industriously engaged in — to use a somewhat vulgar, but appropriate, phrase— "putting it away."

SOMEHOW the time passed, and at nine-thirty it seemed to Billy that the moment was at hand. Mr. Benevolence was sitting back in his chair, safely arrived at the cigar stage, a Grand Marnier awaiting his pleasure, his countenance a study in rosy serenity. The five other "possibles" were also looking their biggest, brightest, and best. And, to Billy's relief— and regret— the severe-looking lady had just settled the liability of herself and "the loveliest girl in the world."

Billy decided to delay action till the ladies had departed. But five minutes passed, and they gave no sign of moving. On the other hand, two of the "possibles" rose to go, and, a minute later Mr. Benevolence bestirred him-self to look at his watch and take a sip of his liqueur.

And Billy, like a speculator apprehending a sudden slump in prices, took fright and acted quickly.

"Waiter, my bill!"

"Yessir." The waiter retired.

No patron of the Planet grill-room has ever witnessed a waiter making out a bill. He only knows that the waiter never fails to return, with the tiny document that means so much, folded, on a little silver salver.

During the waiter's absence Billy prayed fervently for the departure of the two ladies— or, rather, for that of the girl. He did not care a button if the other became petrified— and for the continued serenity of Mr. Benevolence. But the ladies were there when the waiter returned, and, though still serene, Mr. Benevolence had all but finished his Grand Marnier.

The waiter deposited the little silver salver at Billy's left hand and once more retired, though merely to a discreet distance.

"Buck up!" said Billy, abruptly, to himself, and proceeded to put his Test of Humanity into operation.

He lit a fresh cigarette. He picked up the slip of paper, glanced carelessly at the figures, and laid it down. He put a hand in a pocket— and appeared to be slightly astonished. He put the other hand into another pocket—and looked puzzled. He put both hands into two pockets— and became visibly astounded. He dropped the cigarette on the tray and frowned; put his hand to his forehead— sign of serious anxiety— then resumed the futile search, more than ever concentrating on his right-hand neighbor.

SUDDENLY he paused, with a little gesture expressing defeat. Yet he felt he was winning. Whatever our sympathies, most of us have a keen instinct of observation for the unpleasant predicaments of our fellows, though, unlike the vultures, we usually prefer to observe from a distance. Already a dozen or so pairs of eyes were watching, more or less furtively, the diner in difficulties. Billy was only half-aware of these glances for he had caught the glistening, though not so limpid, eye of Mr. Benevolence, and he could not doubt that Mr. Benevolence was in process of being moved.

Small wonder if it were indeed so since by this time Billy's "distressful embarrassment" ought to have made anyone but a waiter weep— inwardly, at any rate. It was, in fact, a far, far better demonstration of misery than Billy knew, for it was real misery, aggravated by the shame of knowing that "the loveliest girl in the world" was one of its witnesses.

Nevertheless, Billy carried bravely on with his miming till, all at once, his relief appeared imminent. Mr. Benevolence was no longer serene; he was obviously perturbed, unhappy, as he beckoned to his waiter.

"Now, thank heaven," thought Billy, "he's going to send me a message— an invitation to join him. All's well"

"Waiter," said Mr. Benevolence, just audibly, "fetch me another liqueur."

He rose heavily. "And I prefer the other side of the table," he added; and, taking three ponderous steps, re-seated himself— with his back to Billy. One can only surmise that the young man's sufferings had been too much

for his tender heart.

Billy was almost stunned.

"Auntie," whispered "the loveliest girl in the world." "Quick!—lend me two pounds!"

"Two pounds, Anna!"— it was a booming voice wearing a silencer— "What on earth for?"

"Oh, hush! That nice boy, with the spectacles, is in an awful hole— must have come out without any money and—"

"Don't be a fool, child! Only this morning I read of—"

"Two pounds, Auntie— or I get up and give him my chain and pendant!"

It would seem that the severe-looking lady knew her niece, for, muttering protests, she took up her pochette.

"Waiter," said the girl, "an envelope and pencil— quickly!"

If need be, a Planet waiter can become, for the time being, a veritable Mercury.

Within the minute, the girl had written a name and address on the envelope, inserted the two notes, and fixed the flap.

"Half a crown. Auntie—quick!... Thanks!... And now let's go— oh, do hurry!"

Billy came to himself. He smiled feebly and thought—

"Nothing for it but the S O S." He sighed— "Wish to goodness she hadn't seen me!"

A waiter presented an envelope— "From the young lady who has just gone."

Billy read the pencilling—"Miss Borrodale, 17 Marmaduke Mansions, Kensington"— and opened the envelope.

"Humanity be hanged!" he murmured joyously; "she's an Angel!"

At ten o'clock he walked— perhaps a little jauntily— into the smoke-room of the Toilers', to discover his four friends sitting patiently round a table. They hailed him ironically, mistaking his manner for bluff.

He laid the receipted bill on the table, saying— perhaps a little smugly: "Gentlemen, you can shell out!"

Their congratulations— in three instances, at any rate—were sincere.

"May one inquire," said Heldon, "as to the shape, or form, in which Humanity flew to the rescue?"

Billy smiled reminiscently. "In the most perfect shape possible," he re-plied, and refused to say any more on the subject. "I have a letter to write at once," he said. "See you all at lunch to-morrow. Good night!"

In another room he wrote the letter — a graceful expression of respectful gratitude— enclosed two pound-notes, and directed it to the person at the address named on the angelic envelope. Then he left the club and took the Tube to Kensington. There, in Marmaduke Mansions, he dropped his letter into the box of No. 17, briefly pressed the bell-button, and retired, the most hopeful, if not positively the happiest, young man in London.

A maid brought the letter to Miss Borrodale, the severe-looking lady.

"Auntie," cried her niece, the instant the door was closed, "what is it, at this time of night?"

"How can I tell till I have examined the contents?" With her customary deliberation, Miss Borrodale took an ivory knife from her writing-table, methodically slit the envelope, and carefully took out the enclosure.

THE two pound-notes came into view.

"Oh, splendid!' the girl exclaimed. "I knew he was all right! And how beautifully prompt!"

"He is certainly punctilious, which is something in these casual days," the elder admitted. She slowly read, or, rather, scrutinised, the letter, then handed it to her niece, who devoured it in a glance.

"What a charming note, Auntie! I knew he must be nice."

"I find nothing charming about the communication," said Miss Borrodale, "and even a— a modern burglar may write politely. At the same time, a letter containing money should be acknowledged without delay."

So saying, she seated herself at the desk and wrote as follows:

Miss Borrodale has received Mr. William Langford Lang's letter of this date, containing the sum of Two Pounds (£2), being repayment of loan, for which she is obliged.

"Auntie," protested Anna, who had been looking over her shoulder, "what a perfectly rotten reply to send him!"

"My dear Anna, it is the proper reply in the circumstances," returned Miss Borrodale, many of whose ways suggested a first birthday in the year 1801. "And now I shall ask Kate to post it—"

"I'll run down with it."

"You are going to bed, my dear. Your uncle's train from the north is due at seven-twenty-five, and he will be here before eight. I am hoping he will not disapprove of our visit to that excessively gay place this evening."

"Not he! I'm going to ask him to take us again," said Anna.

BILLY made an early call at the club, on the "off chance" of there being a note from "the loveliest girl in the world."

It need only be recorded briefly that Billy was, to put it mildly, dashed.

Heldon was one of those men who appear to take a beating good-humoredly, and within the hour begin to think of revenge. It did not take Heldon long to get the idea, which was, as a matter of fact, the obvious one; but he had the wit to bide his time, and let a couple of weeks pass before broaching it to his friends, Billy excepted.

The opportunity came with Billy's ringing up to say he would be late in arriving for lunch.

"Our excellent Billy," remarked Heldon, helping himself to spinach, "is still inclined to be a bit cocky over his successful test of Humanity—"

"Can't say I've noticed it," put in Andy.

"Well, I have; and I confess I'm getting a little tired of it. However, I dare say some crowing is natural enough in the circumstances. At the same time— the idea has just occurred to me— I think it would make rather an interesting experiment if we applied Billy's test to— Billy. What?" And Heldon tenderly tweaked the point of his long nose.

"I say, that's an idea!" said the man on his right. "Might be rather good fun, too. But how would you wangle it, Heldon?"

"It's quite simple," Heldon answered— and explained.

"I should like to see Billy's face!" said Andy. "But we'd have to be sure that he had the needful on him."

"He usually has; but I think I can test that point, if we can fix up the business for to-night. I know he has got nothing on for to-night, for he told me yesterday he was going to work."

"Then," said the man on Heldon's left, with a laugh, "I think we may count— or, rather, bank— on Billy!"

Billy came in while they were at coffee.

"Look here, old man," said Heldon; "we're proposing to dine at the Planet this evening— every man for himself, you understand— and want your company. Don't begin to rave about work!"

Billy hesitated. During the past two weeks he had dined at the Planet oftener than he could decently afford, in the wild hope of seeing her again. But, love and all, he was still a young man who liked the company of his fellows, and hated to be a "stick."

"Righto!" he agreed. "Eight o'clock! I'll be there!"

"And I'll book a table for five," said Heldon. "By the way, Billy, can you let me have two ten-shilling notes for a pound?"

"I'll see," replied obliging Billy, and brought out his note-case. "Yes, I can."

The case was well stored, and, as Billy was picking out the notes requested, Heldon winked to the others.

WITH the exception of Billy, who was inclined to be silent, though not morose, they dined merrily. As the hour drew near, when Billy, all unconscious, was to be tested with his own test, they grew merrier.

Of a sudden Billy caught sight of her. She was far away; only the departure of the groups from several intervening tables could have disclosed her presence. She was with the severe-looking lady, also a grey-haired, clean-shaven man, who was not severe-looking. Billy fancied she was glancing in his direction. On the impulse he got up and bowed gravely.

"Somebody you know?" inquired Andy, as he resumed his seat.

"I don't, as a rule, bow to strangers," Billy answered, shortly; then smiled. "Didn't mean to be crusty, old chap," he apologised. "Yes; someone I haven't seen for ages."

"Are you fellows having liqueurs?" asked Heldon. "Or what do you say to sharing a bottle of vintage port? I feel so extravagant to-night!"

"Righto!" assented everybody. Billy absently, and Heldon proceeded to choose something costly.

At the distant table the grey-haired man had put a question almost similar to Andy's; "Recognise somebody you know over there, Anna?"

Anna was sparkling. "It's the nice boy we saw, Auntie and I, when we were here a fortnight ago— the nice boy with no money—"

"You don't know him," said Miss Borrodale.

"Well, I wish I did. I'd love to hear just how he felt when he discovered that his pockets were full of nothing!"

"What are you talking about, you two?" her uncle mildly inquired.

"There is no need," Miss Borrodale began—

"Auntie thought I had better not tell you, though I was sure you would approve," Anna replied. "The poor boy was in perfect agony because he had no money to pay for his dinner, and I borrowed two pounds from Auntie—"

"He must have been hungry," ob-served Mr. Borrodale.

"I wanted to be sure it was enough— and when we were leaving, I gave it to a waiter in an envelope—"

"A midget waiter, I presume!"

"Uncle George, do be quiet and let me tell it! And I told the waiter, giving him half a crown—"

"Which she has not yet repaid to me!" boomed Miss Borrodale.

"—I told him to give it to the poor boy—"

"So, after all," said Uncle George, "you kept the two pounds to yourself!"

"Oh, dear! What density! Anyway, we hadn't been home an hour when Auntie— I should have written my own name on the envelope— Auntie got a simply charming letter, returning the two—"

"And-six!"

"Really, you are trying, Uncle George! But it was a charming letter, and I'm sorry to have to tell you that Auntie wrote a perfectly rotten reply—"

"Anna," said her Aunt, "I wish you would not use that horrible word!"

"A perfectly rotten reply— and that's why I got a little red when he bowed just now— I was so astonished at his taking notice of me after Auntie's perfectly rotten—Well, that's all, except that his name was— is— William Langford Lang— and a very nice, uncommon and distinguished name, too, I think, and—"

"Langford Lang." exclaimed her uncle. "Why, I used to know a man of that name— knew him well— one of the best—"

"Uncle, perhaps that nice boy is his son!"

"If so, I should like a word with him." Mr. Borrodale took out a case, and from it a card, on the back of which he wrote some words. "Waiter!"

"Waiter!" said Anna, sparkling more than ever, and snatching the card; "there are five gentlemen at a table, yonder, on the other side of the room. Give the card to the ni— to the gentleman with the spectacles— Uncle, please, half a crown for the waiter."

"Thank you, ma'am. Do you wish an answer?"

"No!" boomed Miss Borrodale; then, softly: "Great heavens, child, what has come over you?"

BILLY read the name on the card, and jumped; he read the words on the back— "If you are a son, or relative, of Henry Langford Lang, I should like to shake your hand"— and jumped up.

"Excuse me, you fellows, for just a minute," he said, and left them.

"Yes, sir," he was saying, next moment, "I am a son of Henry Langford Lang."

"Good!" replied Mr. Borrodale, with a warm hand-shake. "Excuse me not rising. I'm hardly better of a strained ankle. I under-stand," he went on, "that you have had some financial dealings with my sister and niece, though you and they have not actually met. Jane, Anna— let me present Mr. Langford Lang. Mr. Lang— my sister, Miss Borrodale; my niece, Miss Anna Borrodale."

Miss Borrodale bowed stiffly, but Billy's ingenuous countenance must have had its appeal at close quarters, for abruptly she held out her hand. Anna, now demure, followed her example.

After a brief chat, Mr. Borrodale declared his regret at having to go. "It is a beautiful night, and I have promised my niece a drive round the parks before going home. But my sister does not care for late hours, and I must not put off more time here. You have my address. Mr. Lang, and I— we shall be glad to see you, when you can spare an evening.... Waiter, my stick."

He had difficulty in rising, and Billy assisted him, saying:

"May I give you an arm to the car, Mr. Borrodale?"

"I shall be obliged."

So they passed out, all together, to the vestibule.

"Had you not been with friends," said the older man, "I should have asked you to join us in our drive and come home with us afterwards for an hour or so. There is much I should like to hear about your father."

"Why, sir," said Billy, with a fast beating heart, "my friends won't mind. It isn't a party, you see; we are all dining on our own. Can you give me half a minute?"

"By all means!"

So Billy flew to a writing-table, scribbled a note, gave it, with a gratuity and instructions to a person in uniform, collected his things from the cloak-room, and rejoined his new friends.

As he gave his arm to Mr. Borrodale, he glanced at "the loveliest girl in the world."

She smiled faintly, mysteriously.

Billy had reached the— shall we say?— Sixth Heaven!

They were still merry at the table. Heldon was refilling the glasses— "Serve Billy right, if he gets none!"— when a person in uniform presented a note:—

I know you will all excuse me. Old friend of my Father's has asked me to spend evening. You might settle my little bit. See you at lunch to-morrow. Good luck!

W.L.L.

The note fell from Heldon's fingers. He cleared his throat.

"By any chance, in spite of our arrangement, has anyone here got any money in his pocket?"

In one drear voice the three replied: "Not a bean!"

———————

17: Prince of Whale Catchers!

Len Lower

1903-1947

Australian Women's Weekly 10 Feb 1934

Captain Ahab had better not rest on his laurels. Len Lower, one of Australia's humorists, has him in his harpoon sights.

MOST girls look upon me as a romantic figure, but they ain't heard nothing yet.

Did you ever hear about the time I went whaling? It was all in the papers. It was on the *Robert Emmet* that I first embarked. A four-masted schooner with four-wheel brakes and a beige funnel. We set sail at about four o'clock on a wet morning.

I WILL not weary you with details of the first part of the voyage, at least not yet. Down in the stokehold men, stripped to the waist, slaved and sweated making toast. Aloft in the foretop-gallantsails, struggling sailors furled and unfurled the sails monotonously. In the crows-nest the lookout, harried by crows, kept ceaseless watch for whales.

I was standing on the bridge, idly spinning the wheel this way and that, when the lookout cried, "Tally ho! Yoicks! Whale ahoy. What ho!" and other sailor-like phrases.

"Heave to!" I ordered.

"Heave to it is, sir," replied the crew, heaving.

I called to my first mate. "Have you taken the soundings?"

"No, sir," he replied; "I can't hear a damn thing."

"Bring the bait aft!" I bellowed.

Very soon we were all busy baiting hooks while the whale, who could smell the prawns, hungrily circled round the ship. I baited the anchor on both flukes and, taking hold of the chain with both hands, swung it around my head a few times and then hurled it into the vasty deep.

Almost immediately I got a nibble. "Lend a hand here!" I shouted. The whale had eaten the prawn off the anchor and was climbing up the chain!

"Give me a hairpin!" I yelled.

"You mean a harpoon, sir?" inquired the mate.

"Have it your own way," I replied sternly, "only gimme the thing."

The whale was only a few feet away from me now and making horrible slobbery noises. One of the crew handed me the harpoon. Taking steady aim. I plunged the harpoon straight into the monster's gaping mouth.

"Ouch!" said the whale. "Atta boy!" yelled the crew.

The whale struggled fiercely, but I had him fast.

I CALLED the crew together. "Boys," I said, "do you think the ship ought to tow the whale or the whale tow the ship?"

"Well, sir," said one of the firemen, stepping forward, "we've only got two scuttles of coal left, and unless we use the gas stove in the galley the steam is going to be only luke warm."

I decided to let the whale tow the ship.

The mate approached me. "The glass is falling, sir."

"Put something soft under it," I replied. The sky was overcast, and I suspected dirty weather ahead.

"All hands aloft!" I cried. "Take the sails down. It's going to rain."

The whale was getting restive and tugging fiercely at the anchor-chain. I had to get a number of men to push hard against the other end of the ship to keep the monster in check.

We had just time to get the binnacle reefed and the rudder hoisted aboard when the storm broke. The wind howled in the rigging, the cabin boy howled in his bunk. Hailstones rained on the deck while the wind lashed itself into a frenzy; the waves came like green mountains, and the bosun was struck down by an isobar.

Slowly the whale forged ahead. It spouted a couple of times, straight down the funnels. I had to cork its spouter so that the stokehold fires would not be put out. I was lashed to the wheel, and the second mate nailed to the binnacle.

The mizzen-mast carried away, just mizzen the mate.

"Send up a couple of rockets!" I roared.

Alas! all the stuff we had left was two catherine-wheels and a packet of throwdowns. The ship was trembling like an aspro leaf, and any moment I expected it to fall to pieces, leaving me lashed to the wheel in midair.

The chief engineer came to me with his resignation written out. "I'm going home," he said. Then he had the nerve to ask for a reference!

"You rat!" I exclaimed. "Would you desert a sinking ship at a time like this?"

"My oath I would!" he replied. I shot him between the eyes.

"THERE'S mutiny down below, sir," said the first mate as he came panting up to the bridge. "The crew say that if you hadn't used up all the rockets on your last birthday we'd have had assistance by now."

Just then there was a horrible creaking of timbers. The crew rushed on deck, wild eyed..

"Abandon ship!" I yelled. "All hands aboard the whale!"

I had no time to unlash myself from the wheel, so I just broke it off at the stem and carried it with me. Three minutes after we boarded the whale the ship sank.

How we lived through that night I still don't know. At dawn we found ourselves about half a mile off land. Then the whale sank. I struck out for the shore and landed, exhausted on the beach, where I was taken care of by friendly natives. The rest of the ship's company was drowned.

I'll have to leave you now. I've got to polish my medals.

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18: The Bechut Mystery

Edgar Jepson

1863-1938

North Western Advocate (Tasmania) 4 Feb 1911

THE GARDEN in the middle of Garthoyle Gardens is in the shape of a triangle; and at each of the three gates is a notice-board declaring that only residents in the Gardens, their families and their friends, are allowed in it. The gardeners have strict orders to turn strangers out. But my uncle Algernon, who left the Gardens to me, had a soft place in his heart, though he was a bachelor, for young people in love with one another; and he gave instructions to the gardeners not to interfere with pairs of lovers.

I let these instructions stand, because the garden looks more as if it had been laid out for the purpose of love-making than any other place of the kind in London. Indeed, on a summer's evening it would look rather incomplete, rather wasted, without some pairs of lovers in it. I am bound to say that I have never found it looking incomplete. I have never used it for that purpose myself.

The only girl I ever talk to in the garden is Amber Devine, the niece of Scruton, the New Zealand gum millionaire, who lives, at No. 9. She is very pretty and nice, but I should never dream of letting myself fall in love with her. If I did, it would be the mess of a lifetime, for she let her uncle use her in a little millionairish game of his by which he tried to trick me into letting him have his house rent free. I have never been able to understand how she came to help him in it, for it is quite unlike anything else in her. But she did; and even if I wanted to make love to her it is quite out of the question.

One Friday night I had arranged to go to a Covent Garden ball, and after dining at home I strolled out about half-past ten into the central garden to smoke a cigarette. The garden never grows stale, like the rest of London in the summer, because it is watered, and watered, and watered. In dry weather all night long there is a patter of falling water from two or three revolving standards on most of the lawns; and if there is any moonlight their sprays glitter very prettily.

As I was crossing the road to the gate which stands in front of my house, I saw a pair of lovers going up the central path of the garden. At least I took them for a pair of lovers, though they were walking rather quickly. The girl was in evening dress, for I saw her shoulders white in the moonlight, and she had a scarf twisted round her head. The man was wearing tweeds and a straw hat. At the same time. I noticed a man in evening dress coming along the pavement on my left, in a rather slinking way, in the shadow of the shrubs on the edge of the garden.

I went through the gate and up the central path, and I had gone thirty or forty yards up it when I heard his feet crunch on the gravel by the garden gate. I looked back to see if it was anyone I knew, but a little bit of cloud was passing over the moon, and he was too far off to recognise. He turned sharply off to the right. I went on a few yards, and sat down on a seat. I had been sitting there two or three minutes when a woman! came in through the gate. She came along at a smart pace, and I saw that; she was wearing a good-sized feathered hat. I could not see who she was, for she wore a veil. She did not look like a wife or daughter of one of my tenants: she looked more like a lady's maid. She went straight un the central path, out of sight in the shadow, of the shrubberies.

The night was not as warm as it might have been. I got up and walked along the central path to find a more sheltered seat. Just before I came to the middle of the garden I met Amber Devine. We do not often meet in the garden in the evening; generally it is in the afternoon. We shook hands; she turned round, and we went on to the middle of the garden. She was in evening dress, with, a light and filmy wrap round her shoulders, and in the moonlight she looked, if anything, prettier than she does in the day. I thought that her eyes were like shining stars. The pair of lovers and the woman in the feathered hat were nowhere in sight.

Now, the middle of the garden is set with shrubberies in the shape of a wheel. The hub is a clump of shrubs; the spokes are narrow shrubberies; and the tyre is a ring, about twenty feet thick, of shrubs. In between the shrubberies which, form the spokes are little lawns. Each of these lawns has a narrow entrance— a break in the tyre of the wheel. We turned into the nearest of these little lawns, and went to a seat at the end of it, right up against the hub of the wheel, and well sheltered, and began to talk.

We always have plenty to talk about; there are the poor children whom Amber collects in the Park and takes for outings to Kew or to the country: and there are the troubles I have with my tenants, owing to the. fact that I run Garthoyle Gardens myself. I always tell her about them, because I find her so sympathetic. As we talked, I heard the sound of voices very faint on the lawn on the other side of the shrubbery on our left. I just noticed it, and no more ; I was giving my attention to Amber. We had been sitting talking for three or four minutes at the outside, when there came the loud, startling bang of a revolver from the lawn on our left, and then a woman's scream.

Amber sprang up with a little cry of fright, and I got up more slowly. There was a crashing in. the shrubbery on our left, and a man in evening dress burst out of it, bolted across the lawn, and out of the entrance.

'Come on!' I said. 'We must look into this!'

'No, no ! Be; careful— oh, do be careful,' cried Amber. And she clutched my arm with both hands..

'It's all right,' I said. 'They won't hurt me. You stop here a minute. You'll be quite safe.' And I tried to loosen the grip of her hands.

'No, you'll get hurt!' she said.

'But I must go— I must really,' I said.

'Then I'm coming, too,' said Amber.

'Very well; only don't be frightened. I'll see that you don't come to any harm,' I said. And I slipped my arm round her waist to encourage her.

We hurried out at the entrance of the lawn, and I saw at once we had lost time. The man in evening dress was nowhere in sight. But in the open garden on the left the lady in evening dress was hurrying down a path which led to the left-hand gate.

She was a good way off, but I called after her: 'What's happened?'

She did not answer; she did not even' look back ; she hurried on. Then, beyond her, on another 'path' also leading to the left-hand gate, I caught a short glimpse of the woman in the feathered hat; as she passed a gap between two shrubberies. She was hurrying, too, as if the sound of the shot had frightened her.

Amber and I ran to the entrance of the lawn from which the sound of the shot had come. In the middle of it lay a man; fallen on his face, with his arms outspread. My first feeling was a great relief that it was not a woman. I ran to him, knelt down, and turned him over. He looked to he a foreigner, a man of about 30. His face was very white; and his eyes were half closed. I felt for his pulse, but could not find it. I was sure that he was dead.

Amber broke into frightened sobbing. I could do nothing. It was a matter for a doctor and the police. I rose and said: 'Come on; we must tell the police.'

We took the path to the left-hand gate. When we came out of it neither of the two women was in sight. That side of the gardens was empty. I took her straight to No. 9, and saw her let herself in with her latchkey. Then, I ran round the top of the gardens and down the other side. At the bottom I found Brooks, one of the policemen who looks after them. I told him what had happened; and on his suggestion we ran round to my house, and I told Richards, my butler, to telephone the news to the police-station. Then Brooks and I ran to the scene of the crime.

The man was lying just as I left him. Brooks knelt down beside him, and examined him.

'He's quite dead,' he said rather shakily, and rose to his feet, looking shocked. He began to look about the lawn, holding his lantern about two feet from the ground and examining it carefully. About six feet from the dead man

he found three envelopes, lying close together. They were empty, and all three were addressed to Sir Theobald Walsh. The addresses were typewritten. I knew Walsh and I was able to assure Brooks that the dead man was not he.

'Well, it's odd as he should have Sir Theobald Walsh's letters,' said Brooks. And he went on searching. The dead man's hat, a straw, was lying quite ten yards from the body, close to the left-hand shrubbery, as if it had pitched off his head and rolled along when he fell. On the other side of the lawn, behind the dead man, half-way between his body and the right-hand shrubbery, Brooks picked up a small revolver. It was stuck sideways in the turf. By the light of his lantern we saw that it was of French make, and that the top of the barrel was choked with earth.

'Now, why on earth was it stuck in the turf?' I said. 'It couldn't have been dropped, because it's not heavy enough to stick into the turf of itself.'

Brooks said we had better not trample about the turf too much; and we came out of the lawn, and waited at the entrance; discussing the crime. It plainly lay between the lady in evening dress and the man who had bolted from the shrubbery. One of them must have fired the shot.

We had not waited long when an inspector of police, a doctor and a man in grey tweeds came hurrying up. They were followed by two policemen wheeling an ambulance.

I gathered that the man in the tweeds was a detective, and his name was Pardoe. He had been at the police station when the telephone message came. He was tall and thin and hook-nosed, with bushy eyebrows and thin lips. He looked like a hawk. He took charge of the business and gave the orders. I told him quickly what I knew; and at once he sent off the two policemen to hunt about the garden to find if anyone in it had heard the shot fired, or seen the lady or the man in evening dress. Then he and the doctor went in to the lawn to the body,

The doctor knelt down beside it; and presently I heard him say: 'Cervical vertebrae smashed. Must have been killed instantly. The bullet is embedded in his neck.'

Pardoe himself fetched the ambulance, lifted the body on to it, and wheeled it out on the lawn. Then, by the light of the lanterns of the policemen, he searched the dead man's pockets. In the breast pocket of the jacket was a good-sized bag of money. He opened it, and took out a handful of coins. They were all sovereigns. There was a handful of loose silver and coppers in one of the trouser pockets; in one of the side-pockets of the jacket was an ugly looking jack knife— such as sailors carry— and very sharp. In the other pocket was a packet of Caporal tobacco, and cigarette papers. In one of the waistcoat

pockets was a cheap. American watch; in the other were four visiting cards, on which was printed the name Etienne Bechut.

When he read the name on the visiting cards, Pardoe took a lantern, and again looked closely at the dead man's face.

'Thought I knew him. A bad lot. Soho,' he said, in quick, jerky sentences.

'Well, then we shall soon find out all about him,' said, the inspector. Then Brooks produced' the revolver, and the typewritten envelopes addressed to Sir Theobald Walsh. Pardoe studied them by the light of a lantern; then he began to question me closely and at length, about what I had seen and heard. I told him that l had seen the murdered man walking up the central path of the garden with a lady in evening dress; that I had seen the man in evening dress come into the garden and go up the right hand path; and that a woman, veiled, and in a feather hat, had gone up the central path about fifty yards behind the lady and the murdered man; that I had strolled up that path myself, met Amber Devine, and gone with her on to the lawn on the left; and we had heard the revolver shot and the scream, and seen the man in evening dress halt.

'Did you see what the lady in evening dress was like?' said Pardoe.

'No, not clearly: but I got just an impression that she was all right — a lady, don't you know?' said I. 'But I didn't recognise, her, and I don't think I should know her again.'

'This foreigner hardly looks the kind of a man a lady would be walking with at this hour, here,' said the doctor.

'You're right there. Dr. Brandon,' said Pardoe slowly. 'But then there's this bag of sovereigns.'

'Blackmail?' said Dr. Brandon.

'Looks like it,' said Pardoe.

'But why should she shoot him? She'd got the letters,' I said.

'We don't know that, my lord,' laid Pardoe.

'She may have wanted to make sure that he did not blackmail her again,' said Dr. Brandon.

'We don't know that she did shoot him,' said Pardoe. And he began to question me about the man in evening dress.

I told him that I should not know him again; that he had been too far off to recognise when he came into the garden, and he had bolted so fast from the shrubbery that I had not caught sight of his face before his back was turned to me, and he was rushing out of the entrance.

Then he asked me in what position the dead man had been lying when I first came on to the lawn. I told him that he had been lying on his face, and that he had fallen with his face towards the left-hand shrubbery, out of which the man in evening dress had bolted.

He asked the doctor whether a man, with that wound, would fall straight forward. Brandon said that the bullet might knock him straight forward, or he might spin round, and then fall.

Then Pardoe questioned Brooks about the finding of the revolver. He too seemed puzzled by the fact that it had been sticking in the turf. He went on to question Brooks about the people he had seen in the Gardens, and found that he had seen none of the three actors in the crime. He was in the middle of these questions when the two policemen who had been scouring the garden for someone who had heard the revolver fired, or seen the lady or the man in evening dress as they fled, came back, with the that they had found no one else who could give any information. They had found three pairs of lovers but each pair had been so absorbed in the business in hand that they had heard and seen nothing.

Pardoe frowned; and considered for a little. Then he told the inspector that he was going straight off to Soho to try to find something in Bechut's lodgings which might throw some light on the matter, and that he would come back at half-past three, and search the lawn and shrubberies. Leaving the inspector and Brooks in charge of the lawn, Pardoe, Brandon, and I left the garden, followed by the two policemen wheeling the ambulance with the dead man on it.

I went home. At twelve o'clock I had some supper; and after it I smoked and read and puzzled over the crime till half-past three. Then l went back to the garden and found Pardoe and the police beginning their examination of the lawn in the daylight

At the very entrance to it Pardoe made a discovery. Hanging from the projecting bough of a shrub was a black lace scarf. It had plainly been caught from the lady's head as she ran out of the lawn. It was an expensive scarf, but not uncommon.

On the lawn itself they found nothing fresh. Then they searched the left-hand shrubbery from which the man in evening dress had bolted. In that they found nothing, not even his footprints, for the soil was hard. They went on to search the shrubbery on the right; and in that they found one of those leather wristbags in which women carry their handkerchiefs and purses. It was old and worn and shabby. It might have been thrown away, by a nursemaid. It smelt strongly of some coarse violet scent, but in the dry weather we had been having it might have lain there for a day or two and still kept the scent. There was nothing more to be done, and I went off to bed.

Soon after breakfast next morning I went round to No. 9 to talk the matter over with Amber. I found that she could throw no more light than I on the identity of either the man or the woman.

I was surprised to find no mention of the matter in the evening papers; the police were keeping their own counsel. Pardoe came to see me in the afternoon, to talk over my evidence, at the inquest; and I learnt from him that Sir Theobald Walsh had declared himself quite unable to identify the three envelopes. I was able to assure him that that settled the question of his getting any information from that quarter. I know Walsh. He is as stubborn as an ox. At the same time, he could hardly be blamed for not giving the lady away.

The inquest brought no new fact to light; it rather complicated the affair. It made it seem most improbable that the revolver had been tired from the left-hand shrubbery, for Brooks had found it between the spot where the man fell and the right-hand shrubbery. This made it look as if the woman had fired the shot. But why had she screamed after it was fired, and not before?

There were not many people at the inquest, but among them I noticed the Duke of Letchworth— we call him the piebald Duke because of his hair— and I saw that he was taking a great interest in the evidence. I had not known that he was one of those people who are keen on crimes and trials; he had never struck me as being morbid. I was a good deal surprised to find that there was no newspaper storm. I had expected there would be columns and columns about the case. This, of course, increased the, mystery, and set me puzzling over it harder than ever. Walsh was the man who knew, but he would never tell. In the case of any other man, it would have been possible to guess the lady. In the case of Walsh it was quite impossible; there were too many of them.

It was curious how after the inquest nothing seemed to happen. The police went on hunting, I knew, for I saw Pardoe in the Gardens frequently; and once or twice he came over to see me and talk over little clues he, had found. They were not of any value, and it was soon quite clear that the police were baulked. They had not traced the scarf to anyone; they could not find the woman with the feathered hat. She might have been able to throw some light on the matter. They went so far as to advertise for her, but with no result. They did not find me of much help. I was not going to run the risk of getting any of my friends into the mess of a lifetime on account of a wretched blackmailing foreigner, but at the same time I went on making inquiries myself, just to try to satisfy my curiosity about the matter; and at last I began to think I was getting warm.

Then one night, a fortnight later. I was playing baccarat at Scruton's, and I fancied that the piebald Duke kept looking at me rather oddly as ho played. The interest he was taking in me must have put him off his usual game, for he actually won— nearly seven thousand. The party broke up about three; and just as I was going out of the house, the Duke called to me:

'Half a minute, Garthoyle. I'll stroll along with you.' And we came out of the house together

'Are you in a hurry to go to bed?' he said.

'Not a bit,' I said. 'I like the early morning.'

'Have you got the key of that middle garden of yours on you?' he said. 'I want to talk to you. And after a long gamble like that, I'd sooner be in the fresh air than not. You might, take me to the lawn where that foreign blackguard was shot.'

The words 'foreign blackguard' were rather an eye-opener. It looked as if the Duke knew something about the affair; more than I did. I had a key on me; we went into the garden, and straight to the lawn.

'It's about this murder that I want to talk to you,' he said slowly, looking round the lawn. 'I know who the lady was who was blackmailed; and I know who the man was who bolted. They came to me and put themselves into my hands. If you go on much further with your inquiries, you'll find out who they were yourself, and you will very likely enlighten the people whose enlightenment would a lot of harm in the way of causing an infernal scandal. Now, I want to give you my assurance that I am absolutely convinced that neither of them had anything to do with the shooting. Both of them were taken utterly by surprise by it, and, as you saw, bolted. I think it was the best thing they could do under the circumstances.... I don't know whether you care to accept my assurance that they were innocent, but I am absolutely convinced of it.'

'I'm quite ready to accept it,' I said, quickly. 'I would sooner take your judgment in the matter than anybody's.'

'Thank you. I thought you would,' he said. And he sighed, as if he had, taken a weight off his mind. 'There are one or two points that support my judgment,' he went on. 'The man lay here, and the revolver there near the right-hand shrubbery. The man who bolted was in the left hand shrubbery on the other side of the body. The shot was fired from the right-hand shrubbery.'

'I noticed that, and it does complicate the matter. It lets the man out pretty well. But it rather makes it look as if the woman may have fired the shot,' I said.

'Yet you yourself brought out thee fact quite clearly that the woman screamed after the shot was fired. I think she told me the truth when she said she screamed because the shot surprised and frightened her.'

'Yes; that sounds right enough,' I said. 'But if neither of those two fired the shot, who on earth did?' I said.

'Well, I think that the police did not attach enough importance to the wrist-bag they found in the right-hand shrubbery, and to the fact that the revolver was of French make. That seem to me the real clues to the murderer.'

'Then who do you think the murderer was?'

'The woman in the feathered hat,' said the Duke.

'The deuce you do!' said I.

'Yes I do. She was veiled. She was following this blackmailing scoundrel, and the lady. She bolted too; and she has disappeared. She never answered tho advertisement. Why is she hiding?' said the Duke.

'These are pretty awkward facts. I shall have to work it out afresh from this point of view,' I said,

'And you might put them to the police. Working on their present lines. they might discover these two innocent people and make a great deal of trouble. It doesn't, seem likely; and I've seen to it that they are not being encouraged to show too much zeal in the matter, but they might if you could put them on the right tack.'

'Oh, I will: or I'll try to,' I said.

'Thank you,' said the Duke.

We turned and walked to the bottom of the garden. As we came out of the gate, I said: 'I suppose, whether the police come in or not, this business has rather smashed up those two people's lives?'

'No; I don't think so,' said the Duke slowly. 'I think that it will be rather the other way about. They were drifting apart, but this business— being in this mess, together— is rather drawing them together again.'

'That's all right,' I said.

IT WAS QUITE plain, that the Duke had seen to it that the police did not make themselves too active in the matter, for I saw nothing of Pardoe for two or three days. Then one morning he came.

'Well, Mr. Pardoe,' I said, 'I have discovered who murdered Etienne Bechut. To begin with, it was neither the lady he was blackmailing nor the man in evening dress. They do not, very naturally, want to appear in the matter; but they have put themselves into the hands of a third person, and told him what happened: as far as they know. I am absolutely convinced of their innocence.'

I paused; Pardoe scratched his head, and looked at me very keenly. 'You'll excuse my asking, my lord, but do you really honestly and truly believe this?'

'I give you my word that I believe them to be absolutely innocent.'

'I take it, my lord, that you're the person they put themselves in the hands of?'

I said nothing.

'Well, my lord, what are your new facts?' he said.

'The shot was fired from the right hand shrubbery by the woman in the feathered hat.'

Pardoe frowned thoughtfully. 'I've thought about her a good many times,' he said.

'Well, my theory is that she followed Bechut and the lady, carrying with her the revolver in the wrist-bag. She slipped into the right-hand shrubbery, took the revolver out of the bag, threw the bag down, shot Bechut, and threw the revolver away so that it stuck in the turf.'

Pardoe sat very still, frowning. Then he said: 'There's certainly something in this. I'll look for her in Soho.'

He wished me good-morning, and hurried off. Three days later he came again. When we were settled down in the library, he said:

'Well, my lord, I've found the woman in the feathered hat; or, to be exact, I've got on her track. The man Bechut was very mixed up with a woman of the name of Cesarine Thibaudier. She seems to have been a thoroughly bad lot, as bad as Bechut himself. At the same time, she seems to have been infatuated with him, and just as jealous as could be. It seems that he had arranged to go to France quietly as soon as he got the money for the letters. He was just running away from her. She found out this plan of his, and rowed him about it, for she had made up her mind that he was going off 'with another woman. She must have watched and followed him.'

'It seems to look pretty promising,' I said.

'Yes; it does fit in,' said Pardoe. 'And then she went off at six o'clock on. the morning after the murder, and has not been seen since. Probably she's in Paris.'

'Well, you ought to be able to catch her without much difficulty,' I said. 'Will you go over to Pans yourself?'

'Wait a bit— wait a bit, my lord,' said Pardoe, smiling. 'Where's our evidence? I've not been able to find anyone who saw Cesarine Thibaudier nearer Garthoyle Gardens than Soho. It's true that I've found two of her friends who declare that the wrist-bag we found is the very image of one that belonged to her, but I counted nine women in Soho carrying the identical wristbag in the course of one morning. Also, Cesarine Thibaudier used that scent of violets of which the bag smelt. But the two women who told me so, smelt of it themselves. I have not been able to trace the revolver to her; and I shouldn't wonder if it belonged to Bechut himself, and she stole it. Again, neither the lady who was blackmailed nor the man who bolted saw anything of the person who fired the shot; or, I take it, they would have told you about it.

Unless this woman chose to confess we haven't enough evidence to hang a cat on.'

'All the same, I'm quite convinced that this woman followed Bechut to Garthoyle Gardens, and shot him from the shrubbery.'

Pardoe took a long pull at his whisky and soda. Then he said: 'Ah, my lord, if we were to arrest all the people we're sure have committed murder we could keep the Central Criminal Court going with murder trials for the next six months. But I don't suppose we'd get one in ten of them hanged. Murder's one thing, and evidence is another.'

'It's very cheery hearing,' I said.

He has not been to see me since; nor have the police arrested Cesarine Thibaudier.

19: The Small Spook's Story

Con Drew

(Conway T. Drew, 1875-1942)

The Lone Hand, 1 Jan 1921

Two ghosts reminiscing in Sydney's Waverly Cemetery. A yarn in the tradition of the Christmas ghost story, by Con Drew, who mostly wrote about the race course and race course men.

FROM away in the distance the city clocks struck three and the tall spook pulled his tattered shroud about him.

"By cripes! it's cold," he chattered.

His companion, a little bleach-boned chap, nodded dejectedly.

"You're right," he answered. "It's cold enough to freeze a bottle of painkiller."

"It beats me what they want to plant a man so near the sea for," said the tall spook presently. "He can't go in for a swim, and there's nothin' else to do."

"That's right," assented the other. "I'd like to be somewhere near the racecourse so that a man could visit the old convincing ground occasionally."

The tall spook seated himself on a fallen headstone.

"So you were a racing man?" he said interrogatively.

"Me?" said the little chap. "I should rather think I was. If it hadn't been for racin' I wouldn't be with you now. Care to hear the story?"

"I'd be delighted," said the tall spook, making room for his companion. "Sit down here and tell me all about it."

The small spook sat down and thrummed on his harp-string reflectively.

"It all happened over a bookmaker chap named Squeaker," he commenced. "Crikey! He was a character. He had so many schemes up his sleeve for makin' money that he had to wear a kimono to hold them. But, in spite of his many good points he had one bad fault— he could never forgive an injury. Treat Squeaker well, and he'd eat out of your hand, but treat him bad and he'd get even with you if he waited till the crack of Doom.

"Well, one day Squeaker stood up to bet in the Paddock at Randwick. His bank was fairly good that day and the first couple of races were in favour of the bookmakers. By the time the big race came along his bag had a real healthy rattle. Just before the Handicap, along comes a jockey named Mosh, and he draws Squeaker aside and has a chin to him.

" 'Get what you can out of Sea Spray in the Handicap,' he says to Squeaker 'He'll start a red-hot favourite and he won't be tryin' a yard.'

"Now, Squeaker was a mate of Mosh's and would take his word for anythin', but he was wantin' money particuar just then, and was shy of takin' a risk.

" 'I see,' he says to Mosh, kind of doubtful, 'but I'm terrible short of money just now. Are you sure that everythin's dinkum, and he won't be livened up on a man?'

" 'Certain,' says Mosh, 'for I'll be ridin' him,' and with that he turns and walks away.

"Well, Squeaker goes back to his stand and counts up his money. Then he stows it away in the bag, and turns to his clerk.

" 'We'll be "goin' on" with Sea Spray in the Handicap,' says he, 'and I want you to get willin' on that pencil. Get the wagers and numbers down and don't bother about how much we're holding. All I'll be wantin' to know is how much Sea Spray's takin' out?'

"The clerk looks up at Squeaker in surprise.

" 'What! Goin' on with Sea Spray,' he gasps. 'Why he looks to be a racecourse certainty.'

" 'Well, he ain't,' says Squeaker shortly. 'You just attend to what I've been tellin' you.'

"Well, the time soon comes to bet on the Handicap and Squeaker digs into Sea Spray for all he is worth. Five to two was the best on offer, but Squeaker was puttin' him in at threes. As fast as they came for Sea Spray, just so fast did Squeaker lay him and when the clerk came up for a breather he was takin' out more than enough.

" 'You're takin' a risk with Sea Spray,' says the clerk to Squeaker anxiously. 'Why don't you get some other horses in?'

" 'Because I know what I'm doin',' says Squeaker. 'Sea Spray ain't tryin' a yard.'

" 'Ain't tryin!' says the clerk. 'lt don't look to me as if he wasn't tryin' judgin' by the way they're backin' him. Who told you he wasn't after it?'

" 'The jockey,' answers Squeaker, and he digs into Sea Spray once more.

"Well, they keep on layin' Sea Spray, and, after a bit, he hardens. Squeaker drops him a half point and still there's money in plenty. At last they lay him at evens and the clerk gets pretty nervous.

" 'I don't like the look of things,' he says to Squeaker. 'A horse that ain't tryin' usually blows out in the bettin'. They often spill the dope around that a horse ain't after it so that they can get a better price about him. Are you sure,' says the clerk, 'that Mosh ain't sellin' you a pup?'

"Squeaker turns and scowls at him angrily.

" 'Don't get askin' silly questions,' he snaps. 'Mosh and me have been friends for years, and I'd take his word agen a thousand.'

"Well, it comes to the time to start the race, and Sea Spray goes to the post at deuces on. He's third position at the peg and faces the barrier like a tradesman. After a bit the starter sends them on their journey and they hit the breeze for home in the wake of a big blood bay.

"Squeaker runs his eye back along the field and places Sea Spray then he nudges the clerk and laughs aloud.

" 'Sea Spray don't look much like a trier,' he says to the clerk. 'Look at him. He's lyin' nearly last.'

" 'Yes, but that don't put him out of the business,' returns the clerk. 'He's a pretty good finisher you know.'

" 'And so is that horse in front,' says Squeaker, pointin' to the bay. 'lf ever he catches that bay I'll go to work.'

"The horses ate up the track like a strip of giant spaghetti and whizzed past the half mile at lightnin' speed. The bay is still to the fore and is widenin' the gap between himself and the rest of the field.

" 'What did I tell you,' says Squeaker to his clerk. 'The bay'll come home singin' ragtime.'

" 'Will he?' says the clerk with his eyes glued on the field. 'lt might be us that'll be whistlin' the tune at the finish.'

" 'Don't be a fool,' says Squeaker irritably; 'Sea Spray couldn't catch that bay horse not if he had an engine inside him.'

"Round the turn they swoop, and into the stretch for home, and still the bay is leadin'. Squeaker gives a whoop of joy.

" 'He's home,' he yells, thumpin' the clerk on the shoulder. 'I knew Mosh told me right. He'd never let me down.'

"Then all of a sudden a roar comes from the crowd and Squeaker feels a chill run down his spine. It was the roar of an army of punters when they see the favourite move. Squeaker turned to the course and his face grew white and strained. From near the tail of the field came a big, brown horse in green. He was mowin' them down like grass, and gallopin' strong and low. Abreast of the Leger he's up with the bay horse, and the boy on the bay gets down to ride him, but Sea Spray shakes him off like a worn out overcoat and wins with his head ip the air.

"Well the clerk expected Squeaker to tear down the grandstand, but he started payin' out without a word.

" 'We won't be bettin' on the last race,' he says when the pay out was over. 'You can pack up the gear and beat it for home.' Then off he goes in search of Mosh.

"He ran him to earth in the bar beneath the grandstand, where Mosh and a couple of cronies were havin' a drink. Squeaker crossed over and stood in front of him.

" 'So you sold me a pup?' he said with deadly calm. 'We've been mates for years, and you sold me a pup.'

" 'I— l— couldn't help it,' lied Mosh, tryin' to edge away from him. 'The horse got away with me and I couldn't pull him up.'

" 'You're a liar,' said Squeaker as white as death. 'A mate of yours drew money off me when I was doing the pay out.' Then he let go a wallop that caught Mosh fair on the jaw. Maybe he didn't mean to hit him so hard or maybe Mosh was extra weak on his pins, but whatever the cause, his head struck the floor with a thud and he never opened his lips in speech again."

The small spook paused in his narrative and gazed towards the east, where the first grey fingers of dawn were pointing up over the sea.

"We'd better be getting a move on," he said to his companion. "It'll be daylight in half an hour."

"Hold on a jiff," said the tall spook aggrievedly; "you set out to tell me how you came to be here. The yarn you've just told me has got no bearing on the matter."

''By cripes it has," rejoined the small spook. ''I was the bloke that Squeaker hit."

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20: Vengeance

Alex. V. Vennard

(Alexander Vindex Vennard, 1884-1947)

The Lone Hand, 1 Jan 1913

The writer wrote most of his serious stories as "Frank Reid", and other stories as by "Bill Bowyang". This story is was under his actual name. (The unusual middle name arises from the fact that he was born on Vindex Station, near Winton in Queensland).

IT would be idle to say that the man did not know whose house he had entered. Success in burglary depends largely upon an intelligent comprehension of the fundamentals. The man was no ordinary burglar, and that was why, when the house had first attracted his attention, he had made covert inquiries concerning its occupants. What he had learned from his inquiries may have fired his desires; certainly it had made him extremely cautious, for the clock on the mantelpiece had dragged its long hand five minutes closer to the hour before he carefully drew aside the heavy curtains of the window and stepped into the room.

He had the coolness that comes of long experience in his profession. Below the black mask that gave his features an uncanny outline was a clean-shaven chin that projected with a square aggressiveness. His garments were faultless in texture and cut. Divested of the mask he might have been an harmonious figure in the richly-furnished room. But that which was in his mind was death. And death harmonises with nothing.

He had thought it all out that day. He had not been surprised when he had learned the man's name. He had been only satisfied, and had sighed as one come to the end of a long Journey. He had burglarised because that method of securing a competence had appeared to be the only one remaining to a man bereft of fortune, hope and confidence in his fellow-man. But now into the old song had come a new note, and because of it he felt a strange exultation. It was like the freshening breeze that stirs the sun-parched leaves in the cool of the evening.

The room into which he had crept was large— the library. It was all as he had hoped for in the days of his ambition. Perhaps his tastes might not have led him to such excessive extravagance, but yet what could not a man do when fortune had poured his coffers full? There were costly prints upon the walls— and paintings; he saw that whoever had selected them had not lacked the artistic sense. Upon the inlaid tabletop were magazines and books and a telephone. The photograph of a woman rose above the litter of book-case derelicts; the silver frame encasing it seemed not to be more pure or honest than the frank, quiet eyes that gazed mutely at the man.

But he grew rigid with a cold hatred as he leaned over the table to peer at the photograph. Yet his hatred was not for the fearless eyes that met his.

Beyond the photograph of the woman he saw another face— a man's face. This was the room in which that man passed his leisure hours. Perhaps in the great chair that stood so close to the table he sat while he gazed fondly at the photograph of his wife, while he gloated over his ill-gotten!

A noise at the door found the man not unprepared. He stood erect, rigid with a cold anticipation. Yet there was no time to drop the photograph. So he held it— facing outward— close to his breast, while with the sliding motion that comes of long practice, he drew his heavy revolver and swung it lightly upward— covering the door.

A woman entered— the woman of the photograph. He would have known her among a multitude. She was richly gowned and jewelled— a glittering fortune.

Not until she had closed the door behind her did she see the man, and then she stopped short and leaned against the casing, breathing heavily. For a moment her eyes closed and her face paled unnaturally. Then, though her face lost none of its pallor, her eyes shone fearlessly.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded.

"Visiting," answered the man.

She was silent. The man crooked his right arm, swinging his revolver upward against his breast. The weapon gave forth a metallic click as it came in contact with the silver frame held in the man's left hand. The woman's eyes followed the weapon, and then sought the photograph.

"What are you doing with my picture ?"

Her tone might have been scornful had there not been so much of curiosity in it.

The man laughed mirthlessly.

"Looking at it," he answered.

"Please be so kind as to place it on the table," she said tensely, as though she thought the hand that held the photograph might be unclean.

"In good time," returned the man in a passionless tone. "Where is your husband?"

"At his office."

The man's lips smiled.

"You are alone in the house," he said. "I wondered why you did not cry out."

'"There are the servants," said she defiantly.

"Asleep," mocked the man.

"What do you want?" asked the woman, a great fear coming upon her.

"I came to renew old acquaintance," answered the man.

"There must be some mistake," returned the woman coldly; "there are no criminals among my acquaintances."

The man laughed. "Perhaps not. You would not call your husband an acquaintance."

The woman's eyes lighted angrily.

"What do you mean?" she asked coldly. "Do not add insult to your— your other crimes. Take what you want and go!"

The man laughed queerly. "Perhaps you would not be so generously disposed if you knew." He leaned toward her and spoke without passion.

She searched his face with wide, eager, doubting eyes.

"I have come to take your husband with me into eternity!"

The woman shrank back, cowering.

"A lunatic!" she faltered through suddenly quivering lips.

"No!" declared the man; "an avenger."

"An avenger," she repeated contemptuously, though she shivered with dread and spoke breathlessly; "how can you say that ? There can be nothing to avenge."

"You may judge of that after I have said a word," answered the man.

He placed the photograph carefully down,' and with the grace of a courtier motioned the woman to a chair near the table. She came from the door haltingly, as though fearful of the outcome, and once in the chair she held herself erect, rigid and alert, preparing to dart for freedom. The man seated himself opposite her, facing the door, his revolver on the table in front of him. During the oppressive silence that, ensued the woman could hear his deep breathing; she knew from it that he was laboring under a mighty emotion. Once, as he flashed a glance at her, she caught his eyes glinting through the almond-shaped slits of the mask, and they sparkled with a fierce consuming fire that filled her with a nameless terror,

"I have a deep-seated contempt for the conventional narrative," said the man breaking the silence with soft-toned words. "There is always the inevitable, stereotyped introduction, embellished with imaginary incident, tempered with dashes of local color, a preliminary presentation of motive, and so forth. I shall tell my story as it pleases me, relating only its facts and omitting objectionable and irrelevant incident."

He turned and faced her, leaning his elbows on the table.

"Your husband's full name is James Randill?" he said.

"Yes."

"You first met him in Brisbane, in your father's house?"

"Yes."

"He was introduced to you by Dick Williams?"

"Yes."

The man's lips were wreathed in a strange smile.

"Did you love Dick Williams?" he asked.

A flush mounted the woman's white forehead, and her eyes drooped waveringly, as though over some half-forgotten time.

"Dick Williams knew," she answered softly.

"Do you remember that Jim Randill and Dick Williams went trading in the South Seas together?"

"Yes"

It was not unlike a catechism. She felt that she should not suffer the indignity of answering the man's questions, and yet she had not the courage to refuse.

"And do you remember that at the end of two years Randill returned to Brisbane with the news that he had made a big rise out of pearls, and that Williams was dead?"

She nodded, looking at him wonderingly. She had forgotten her fear of him through an intense desire to hear him to the end.

"Randill's story was that Williams had been killed in a brawl with the natives on a small island south of Samoa," continued the man.

The woman's face reddened.

"My husband said that had been the report. I can't believe that Dick would participate in a brawl."

The man cleared his throat

"But there was no one to deny it," said he reprovingly. "Williams had no friend who believed in him "

"Poor Dick " said the woman.

"Yes, poor Dick," repeated the man, his voice vibrating with emotion. He laughed hoarsely, unpleasantly. "Was there no one who doubted Randill's story?"

"Doubt it?" The woman sat erect, gazing at the man with surprised eyes. "Why should we doubt it? Dick did not come back."

"Yes," said the man, "Dick did come back. But it was too late."

"Dick did come back?" questioned the woman, leaning forward with an intense look in her eyes. "He came back well and strong? And he knew why— why I had not waited for him?"

"Dick came back well and strong. And he found why you had not waited for him," said the man evenly. "And then he started out to find—"

"He started out to find— whom?" she questioned breathlessly.

"James Randill," said the man sternly.

"I do not understand," said the woman wonderingly. "Why does he wish to find my husband?"

"To kill him!" answered the man.

The woman sat silent for a moment, stunned by the cold brutality of the answer. Then she half rose from her chair, the dawn of a horrible suspicion in her eyes.

"Who are you?" she whispered tremulously. "You are not—"

"I am Dick Williams," said the man coldly

He removed his mask and sat looking at her, a man of thirty-five with streaks of silver in his short, dark, virile hair. He had a firm face, strongly lined, a face that reflected eternities of hard, bitter thought and failure.

The woman looked intently at him over the short space that separated them. Leaning forward on her hands, her body tense and stiff, she searched his face with wide, eager, doubting eyes. She saw the failure first. It was in the lines of the eyes, lines that showed the pain of constant and bitter defeat. Cynicism was there also, and deceit, and behind it all she saw something that gripped at her heart with painful insistence— the cruelty of the man who is no longer a man, but a beast that preys upon society— the hardened criminal! It came upon her suddenly, in spite of the first signs that should have prepared her, and she swayed back in her chair, horror-stricken and shuddering, covering her face with her hands.

"God in Heaven!" she exclaimed, tremulously.

The man laughed mirthlessly. "It isn't the Dick Williams of seven years ago, is it? This life doesn't bring out the tenderness and the virtue of the soul! God, no! It stamps the virtue into the mire of dishonesty, and grinds the tenderness into a he'll of cruelty and deceit!" He laughed again bitterly. "And yet I am what your husband made me." He leaned far over and grasped her hands firmly, pulling them slowly toward him so that they rested in the centre of the table— his prisoners. Then he rapidly, sharply.

"No one doubted Handill's story, though he went back to Australia with his ill-gotten wealth and with the blood of Dick Williams on his hands. Went back—"

"No! No! No!" The woman's form stiffened, and she gazed wildly at the man, her white lips voicing the agonised protest.

The man smiled grimly.

"He came home to Brisbane and lied to you, telling you that Williams had been killed in a brawl," continued the man coldly; "but he did not tell you his hand was the one which had wielded the knife, and that his murderous heart had devised the scheme which made the crime appear justifiable." He broke off suddenly, and releasing her hands reached into an inner pocket and drew

out a long, keen-edged knife. Taking it by the handle, he raised it suddenly, and then swept it downward, burying its point deeply into the highly-polished wood of the table. There it stuck, the blade dazzling the woman's eyes, the bone handle swaying to and fro like a reed in the wind. On the side of the handle nearest her, seeming to stare at her with their mocking proof, were the carved initials, J.R.

"It is your husband's knife, madam," said the man. "I kept it with me through a year's battle for life at the hospital, and I have treasured it until now, thinking that when I should find its owner I would return it to him."

In his voice she recognised the tearing, rending animal passion that she had read in the lines of his eyes when he had removed the mask. She sat rigid, her hands gripping the table's edge— battling with an icy terror that was clutching at her heart.

She fought bravely for her composure, and the man's eyes were almost sympathetic as he watched her.

And in the end she won, for presently she sat erect and leaned toward the man, speaking quietly and with deliberation.

"Dick," she said, "in the days before my husband came into our lives I used to admire you for your absolute honesty and justice. There was a manliness in your every action that gave beauty to your character. Often in the old days you told me it was a crime to fore-judge a man, to condemn him without a hearing. Do you re-member ?"

The man looked into her eyes, and a flash of affection came into his own. But the hardness of an undying hatred took its place when he spoke.

"He has been judged according to his deeds," he said grimly.

"Ah!" The woman caught her breath sharply. "That is because you are the judge. But, Dick"— her tone was sorrowful— "how am I to know— to judge between you, between my husband and— and my old friend?"

The man rested his elbows on the table, placed his chin on his hands and looked at her. There was a strange, grimly meditative expression in his eyes. She felt that her appeal had almost softened him.

"Do you wish to be the judge?" He asked.

"I must," said the woman resolutely.

The man pointed to the telephone.

"Call him" he said. "Tell him that you want him at home. That you will await him in the library."

The woman breathed rapidly. Her eyes sought the heavy revolver lying within her reach. She shuddered and looked away from it.

"You will promise not to—to shoot?"

"You are to be the judge," answered the man.

For a moment the woman sat gazing at the man through half-closed eye-lids. Then, with a sudden resolution, she took down the receiver and called the exchange.

The man bowed his head as he listened to the woman's voice. It was passionless, even listless.

"Jim?— This is Mary— I want you to come home at once— Yes, very important— I will wait for you in the library."

The man bowed his head lower. So, he would meet Randill. Randill would be surprised when he entered the room. Just as he himself had been surprised on that day when his friend had tried to murder him. It would not be as he had planned, but then there was the woman, and in the beginning he had not considered her. Yet, his love for her was gone. His life— yes, that was it. His life had not been a life of love. Not for seven years

He heard the woman the replace the receiver, and he looked up. She was standing a little away from him, and his revolver was in her hand, the muzzle trained upon him. He started involuntarily, and then sat quiet, for he remembered that in the old days she had handled a weapon almost as well as he. He smiled ironically, for he could not forget that he had taught her the mysteries and the possibilities of the weapon.

She drew another chair to her, and seating herself, brought the revolver to a rest. She was very white, but composed.

"I'll trouble you to remove that knife and place it on this side of the table, she said evenly to the man. He obeyed her silently, and she rose and secured the weapon, concealing it in her bosom. Then she resumed her chair.

"We are going to test this case in the only manner that could possibly appeal to me. You will meet my husband face to face— alone. When he comes I shall retire behind the curtains of the archway and listen. You will both be unarmed, and there will be no scene."

While the minute hand on the ornamented clock dragged itself slowly over the gold figured face they sat in a deep silence. To them from time to time came the rumble of distant wheels and the indescribable noises of the night.

Five— ten— fifteen minutes. Then came a sound as of a door opening and closing, and then footsteps in the passage-way. The woman rose from her chair, and backing away from the man, concealed herself behind the heavy curtains of an archway.

The library door opened suddenly. Unlike his wife, Jim Randill did not stop to close the door behind him, but walked to the centre of the room.

The watching woman saw him start, saw a ghastly pallor overspread his face, heard his voice— agonised and shuddering— vibrate in the stillness

"Dick Williams!"

The woman's hands clenched on the heavy curtains: quite as tightly as her husband's clenched over the back of the chair that stood near him. But the woman withheld her breath, while her husband's whistled in his throat as though iron fingers were throttling him.

The man beside the table laughed ironically as he threw a furtive glance in the direction of the curtains.

"Surprised?" he said laconically. "I thought you would be. That's why I didn't send in my card." His lips smiled, but his eyes danced as he watched the other man, who had placed his back against the wall, his arms outstretched, and was now slowly working his way toward the door.

"Don't go, Jim," said the man at the table; "there are some things I would like to talk to you about. There is really no need of getting yourself excited," he went on, laughing and turning the palms of his hands outward; "you see I am not armed." He deliberately turned his back to the other man and seated himself at the opposite side of the table. The other man hesitated in his journey toward the door, then came away from the wall and stood near the table, trembling with indecision. Behind the curtains the woman's hands were clasped over her bosom.

"Sit down, Jim!" The man's tone was commanding.

The other man took a tottering step and collapsed into a chair beside the table.

"You know why I am here," said the man. "I have hunted you for five years. What do you intend to do ?"

The other man roused himself and glanced fearfully about the room.

"Where is she—my wife?" he questioned. I— thought—"

The man interrupted him— smiling with his lips only.

"An impersonation," he said quietly. "I was impatient to see you."

"She does not know," began the other.

"How could she?" sneered the man; "you have never told her."

The woman behind the curtains smiled wanly as her husband relaxed his tense muscles and sighed with relief. Breathlessly she leaned forward as he rose in his chair and whispered to the man:—

"Hick, for God's sake, don't let her know I— l— God help me! I love her!"

The man laughed cynically. From behind her curtain the woman saw his eyes flash with a deep cunning.

"Randill," he said coldly, "when I was in the hospital fighting for the life you tried to take from me, I thought nothing but your life could appease my vengeance. It seemed to me then that even such a price was small enough. But now"— he laughed with a grim humor— "conditions have changed, and I have

changed with them. The price I ask you to pay is small in comparison to your crime. It is the love of a woman!"

"God in heaven, man; don't tell her! I will make restitution! I will"

The man smiled at the curtains.

"You admit that you attempted to murder me?"

"I do."

"That you stole my share of the pearls that we found near Trinity Reef?"

"Yes."

The man smiled into the eyes of the other mysteriously. He saw the curtains move, saw the woman's face— despairing and haggard— come slowly into view. He laughed grimly.

"That is all," he said triumphantly. Then, turning to the woman, he said, "You can judge now."

She had come out of her concealment, and now stood beside the curtains. She had regained her usual air of proud serenity.

"Dick," she said, "although my husband may have wronged you in the past, he repents now and I pity him. I love him, and shall not desert him now in his hour of sorrow." Seeing tears in her husband's eyes she lost her self-control and hid her face in her hands.

At these words the features of the man at the table contracted and grew absolutely livid; he grasped the revolver which the woman had thrown on the table, fondled it for a moment, and then placed it in his pocket.

"I am satisfied," came from him at last in low tones. "If you love him, you can have him. I've had my revenge."

Without looking at the broken-spirited man, Dick Williams strode towards the window at which he had entered. The woman watched him until she heard the dull thud of his feet striking the earth beneath the window.

Then she turned, and kissed her husband's clammy brow.

21: A Gamble in Hats

Con Drew

The Lone Hand, 16 Aug 1919

They say Aussies will gamble on anything

LYING back upon the operation table, book-maker Brusher caught the cold, clear words of the doctor, and chuckled softly.

"Nearly off, am I? Well, It'd take a lot more dope than youse two have pumped into me to send me off. Why I ain't even drowsy."

He rolled his eyes back towards the white-capped nurse, but could see nothing. Somehow the room seemed dark.

"Yes, he's nearly off," continued the voice of the surgeon. "Next time he inhales, try to catch him on the rebound.

Another whiff of the sickly scented ether invaded Brusher's system, and he felt someone take him by the arm. The arm was raised to the height of a foot or so, then dropped suddenly, and Brusher laughed once more. The antics of the surgeon amused him.

He was still laughing heartily when his clerk strode into the room carrying Brusher's clothes and betting gear.

"Come on, saddle up," said the newcomer, catching him by the elbow. "You're wanted down at the Quay."

"The Quay!" exclaimed Brusher, rising to his feet unsteadily. "What do they want me down there for?"

"I'll tell you when we get to the tram," answered the other. "A man can't talk in front of the quack here."

The doctor and nurse retired discreetly, and Brusher got into his clothes.

"Well, what's the strong of it all?" he questioned, as they found themselves in the tram. "You seem to be terrible mysterious about it."

The clerk leant toward him confidentially.

"It's this way," he explained. "All the coppers have gone over to Pyrmont to settle a mask strike and the boys are having a little hat gamble on the strength of it."

"Hat gamble?"

"Yes," nodded the clerk. "There's a regular racecourse crowd outside the North Shore Ferry Wharf, and the bookies have started a ring there. As each North Shore boat comes in, they make a book on hats, and the first hat that passes out through the turnstile, whether it be straw, felt or Panama, lands the money."

"I see," said Brusher; "and are caps in it?"

"Oh, yes," answered the other. "The books pay any kind of headgear, providin' a man is wearin' it."

"H'm," said Brusher. "It don't seem a bad sort of scheme."

Arriving at the Quay they found it crowded to the iron guard rails. Swarms of punters choked the entrance to the North Shore ferry landing stage, and overflowed to the roadway. The pavement nearby resembled a miniature racecourse. Here a score or more bookmakers, in full racing rig, were calling the odds lustily and sweep promoters were legion. Without loss of time Brusher selected a site near the guard rails, and whipping on his betting bag gave tongue.

"Come on," he said, "I'll bet on the Hat Stakes. Three to one the field."

The punters closed in on him. "What price Felts?" they chorused,

"Threes," answered Brusher. "There's ten flamin' Felts to every other hat in the universe. Three to one the field."

"I'll take you fours," said a punter, holding out some silver invitingly.

Brusher pushed the money aside. "Take the bung out of your brain chamber," he retorted. "I ain't here for the good of my health."

The man walked away, mumbling to himself, and Brusher turned to the crowd.

"Well, is seven to two any good to you?" he bellowed. "I'll run up the scale a bit. Seven to two the field."

That brought them, and soon Brusher was shovelling money into the bag with the speed of an express engine.

Presently the clerk pulled him up.

"That's enough of felts," he said; "they're taking out fifteen quid."

"What odds," laughed Brusher; "they've got to win, ain't they?"

"Yes, I know they have," returned the clerk, "but we kicked off without any money, and we'll have to go easy."

"Bah!" snorted Brusher; "you leave it to me."

He kept on laying for a time, then finally eased up.

"That's all I want of felts," he announced.

The crowd moved away grumbling, and Brusher dug into the other hats.

"Five to one straws," he bellowed; "six to one bowlers, seven to one caps, fifteens panamas or tweeds. Come on, I won't cut you off. Who wants to have a bet?"

The punters nibbled, and Brusher laughed joyfully.

"Spare me days, this is a bean feast," he chuckled. "How much am I holding?"

The clerk carried out the bets and made up his field money with amazing rapidity.

"You're holding a tenner to pay twenty," he answered. "You'd better get some more hats in."

Again Brusher got to business, and to some purpose, for in spite of the great demand for felts, he soon had two or three other hats well up.

"Is it any better now?" he queried.

"Ye-s, she's a little better," admitted the clerk, "but she's a long way from lookin' sweet. Dig into them roughies."

Brusher displayed some hesitancy.

"What's the good of that?" he growled. "We want to give ourselves some sort of a chance, don't we? I think we'll let it go at that, and trust to luck."

"That's no good to me," returned the other heatedly.

"We're goin' up for more money than we can pay, and the crowd will dump us in the harbor. You open your shoulders out and dig into it, you big loafer."

Brusher made a grimace.

"All right," he replied. "A man ought to get a stretch for comin' at it though."

Here a hungry-looking, wall-eyed individual, who had been touring round aimlessly, came to a stop in front of them.

"What price top hats?" he questioned.

"Twenties," answered Brusher promptly.

"Come off," rejoined the other sarcastically.

"Well, then, twenty-fives," laughed Brusher, holding out his hand, "The peace ball's just over, you know, and there's plenty of 'em about."

"Oh, all right," answered the other. "A pony to a note top hats."

Brusher took the money, and handing over the ticket tried to graft some more hats in, but a fresh rush had come for felts, and the punters wouldn't budge an inch.

"By crikey! they have stuck their toes into the ground," growled the clerk, when Brusher had been working for a space. "What'll we do if we can't bet round?"

"You can search me," answered Brusher carelessly; "anyway, it's too late to talk about it now. Look! Here comes the boat."

The clerk gazed harbourwards, and a scare shot through him. Gliding in towards the landing stage, with engines already stopped, the boat bore down upon them, her decks like a bee hive alive with passengers.

"By crikey! we're gone to the pack," he said to Brusher nervously. "I can see nothin' else but felts."

Brusher scanned the passengers narrowly.

"Yes, there's a few felts," he admitted, "but I can sight a straw or two among 'em."

"Straws are just as bad as felts," returned the clerk. "I think I'll do a duck."

He made to move away, but Brusher grabbed his arm.

"Oh, no, you don't, me gentleman," said he; "we're goin' to see this through together."

"But I am goin,' " said the clerk, struggling in his endeavours to free himself. "You leave me go,"

But Brusher did not answer. Eyes bent upon the passengers, he was scanning them closely. Gradually the boat drew in, a keen-eyed deck hand poised rope in hand ready to loop the bit. When almost abreast of the pontoon she went astern.

Bing! Like a flash a wild gang of felt-hatted men jumped to the landing stage and rushed madly for the turnstile. So anxious were they to reach the exit that they hampered one another in their stride. The clerk made another attempt to get away.

"Felts will win," he cried excitedly. "It's a thousand to one on them winnin', and the crowd will dump us in the water."

"Not them," answered Brusher easily. "We ain't lost yet."

"But they will," insisted the clerk. "Let us do a get while we've got the chance."

On dashed the crowd, wrestling and struggling in their endeavours to reach the exit, then wheeling like a mob of cattle they disappeared behind an angle of the building.

Brusher shifted his gaze to the turnstile through which they must next appear, and waited anxiously.

"We might get a turn up even now," he muttered. "It would be funny if—"

Then suddenly he emitted a bellow of triumph.

Coming through the turnstile, with massive shoulders squared, was a huge Hindoo, a neatly folded turban adorning his well-formed head.

"A skinner!" bellowed Brusher, banging the clerk upon the shoulder vehemently. "A skinner! It's a great big Hindoo, and he's wearing a tur—"

Brusher opened his eyes, and his gaze rested on the familiar walls of the hospital ward. Then they shifted to the nurse in front of him.

"By crikey, nurse," he said apologetically, "I took that flamin' cap of yours for a turban."

22: The Resurrection of Mr. Wiggett

W. W. Jacobs

(William Wymark Jacobs, 1863-1943)

The Strand Magazine, Dec 1900

MR. SOL KETCHMAID, LANDLORD of the Ship, sat in his snug bar, rising occasionally from his seat by the taps to minister to the wants of the customers who shared this pleasant retreat with him.

Forty years at sea before the mast had made Mr. Ketchmaid an authority on affairs maritime; five years in command of the Ship Inn, with the nearest other licensed house five miles off, had made him an autocrat.

From his cushioned Windsor-chair he listened pompously to the conversation. Sometimes he joined in and took sides, and on these occasions it was a foregone conclusion that the side he espoused would win. No matter how reasonable the opponent's argument or how gross his personalities, Mr. Ketchmaid, in his capacity of host, had one unfailing rejoinder— the man was drunk. When Mr. Ketchmaid had pronounced that opinion the argument was at an end. A nervousness about his license— conspicuous at other times by its absence— would suddenly possess him, and, opening the little wicket which gave admission to the bar, he would order the offender in scathing terms to withdraw.

Twice recently had he found occasion to warn Mr. Ned Clark, the village shoemaker, the strength of whose head had been a boast in the village for many years. On the third occasion the indignant shoemaker was interrupted in the middle of an impassioned harangue on free speech and bundled into the road by the ostler. After this nobody was safe.

To-night Mr. Ketchmaid, meeting his eye as he entered the bar, nodded curtly. The shoemaker had stayed away three days as a protest, and the landlord was naturally indignant at such contumacy.

"Good evening, Mr. Ketchmaid," said the shoemaker, screwing up his little black eyes; "just give me a small bottle o' lemonade, if you please."

Mr. Clark's cronies laughed, and Mr. Ketchmaid, after glancing at him to make sure that he was in earnest, served him in silence.

"There's one thing about lemonade," said the shoemaker, as he sipped it gingerly; "nobody could say you was drunk, not if you drank bucketsful of it."

There was an awkward silence, broken at last by Mr. Clark smacking his lips.

"Any news since I've been away, chaps?" he inquired; "or 'ave you just been sitting round as usual listening to the extra-ordinary adventures what happened to Mr. Ketchmaid whilst a-follering of the sea?"

"Truth is stranger than fiction, Ned," said Mr. Peter Smith, the tailor, reprovingly.

The shoemaker assented. "But I never thought so till I heard some o' the things Mr. Ketchmaid 'as been through," he remarked.

"Well, you know now," said the landlord, shortly.

"And the truthfullest of your yarns are the most wonderful of the lot, to my mind," said Mr. Clark.

"What do you mean by the truthfullest?" demanded the landlord, gripping the arms of his chair.

"Why, the strangest," grinned the shoemaker.

"Ah, he's been through a lot, Mr. Ketchmaid has," said the tailor.

"The truthfullest one to my mind," said the shoemaker, regarding the landlord with spiteful interest, "is that one where Henry Wiggett, the boatswain's mate, 'ad his leg bit off saving Mr. Ketchmaid from the shark, and 'is shipmate, Sam Jones, the nigger cook, was wounded saving 'im from the South Sea Highlanders."

"I never get tired o' hearing that yarn," said the affable Mr. Smith.

"I do," said Mr. Clark.

Mr. Ketchmaid looked up from his pipe and eyed him darkly; the shoemaker smiled serenely.

"Another small bottle o' lemonade, landlord," he said, slowly.

"Go and get your lemonade somewhere else," said the bursting Mr. Ketchmaid.

"I prefer to 'ave it here," rejoined the shoemaker, "and you've got to serve me, Ketchmaid. A licensed publican is compelled to serve people whether he likes to or not, else he loses of 'is license."

"Not when they're the worse for licker he ain't," said the landlord.

"Certainly not," said the shoemaker; "that's why I'm sticking to lemonade, Ketchmaid."

The indignant Mr. Ketchmaid, removing the wire from the cork, discharged the missile at the ceiling. The shoemaker took the glass from him and looked round with offensive slyness.

"Here's the 'ealth of Henry Wiggett what lost 'is leg to save Mr. Ketchmaid's life," he said, unctuously. "Also the 'ealth of Sam Jones, who let hisself be speared through the chest for the same noble purpose. Likewise the health of Captain Peters, who nursed Mr. Ketchmaid like 'is own son when he got knocked up doing the work of five men as was drowned; likewise the health o' Dick Lee, who helped Mr. Ketchmaid capture a Chinese junk full of pirates and killed the whole seventeen of 'em by— 'Ow did you say you killed'em, Ketchmaid?"

The landlord, who was busy with the taps, affected not to hear.

"Killed the whole seventeen of 'em by first telling 'em yarns till they fell asleep and then choking 'em with Henry Wiggett's wooden leg," resumed the shoemaker.

"Kee— hee," said a hapless listener, explosively. "Kee— hee— kee—"

He checked himself suddenly, and assumed an air of great solemnity as the landlord looked his way.

"You'd better go 'ome, Jem Summers," said the fuming Mr. Ketchmaid. "You're the worse for liker."

"I'm not," said Mr. Summers, stoutly.

"Out you go," said Mr. Ketchmaid, briefly. "You know my rules. I keep a respectable house, and them as can't drink in moderation are best outside."

"You should stick to lemonade, Jem," said Mr. Clark. "You can say what you like then."

Mr. Summers looked round for support, and then, seeing no pity in the landlord's eye, departed, wondering inwardly how he was to spend the remainder of the evening. The company in the bar gazed at each other soberly and exchanged whispers.

"Understand, Ned Clark," said the indignant Mr. Ketchmaid, "I don't want your money in this public-house. Take it somewhere else."

"Thank'ee, but I prefer to come here," said the shoemaker, ostentatiously sipping his lemonade. "I like to listen to your tales of the sea. In a quiet way I get a lot of amusement out of 'em."

"Do you disbelieve my word?" demanded Mr. Ketchmaid, hotly.

"Why, o' course I do," replied the shoemaker; "we all do. You'd see how silly they are yourself if you only stopped to think. You and your sharks!— no shark would want to eat you unless it was blind."

Mr. Ketchmaid allowed this gross reflection on his personal appearance to pass unnoticed, and for the first time of many evenings sat listening in torment as the shoemaker began the narration of a series of events which he claimed had happened to a seafaring nephew. Many of these bore a striking resemblance to Mr. Ketchmaid's own experiences, the only difference being that the nephew had no eye at all for the probabilities.

In this fell work Mr. Clark was ably assisted by the offended Mr. Summers. Side by side they sat and quaffed lemonade, and burlesqued the landlord's autobiography, the only consolation afforded to Mr. Ketchmaid consisting in the reflection that they were losing a harmless pleasure in good liquor. Once, and once only, they succumbed to the superior attractions of alcohol, and Mr. Ketchmaid, returning from a visit to his brewer at the large seaport of Burnsea,

heard from the ostler the details of a carouse with which he had been utterly unable to cope.

The couple returned to lemonade the following night, and remained faithful to that beverage until an event transpired which rendered further self-denial a mere foolishness.

IT WAS about a week later, Mr. Ketchmaid had just resumed his seat after serving a customer, when the attention of all present was attracted by an odd and regular tapping on the brick-paved passage outside. It stopped at the tap-room, and a murmur of voices escaped at the open door. Then the door was closed, and a loud, penetrating voice called on the name of Sol Ketchmaid.

"Good Heavens!" said the amazed landlord, half-rising from his seat and falling back again, "I ought to know that voice."

"Sol Ketchmaid," bellowed the voice again; "where are you, shipmate?"

"Hennery Wiggett!" gasped the landlord, as a small man with ragged whiskers appeared at the wicket, "it can't be!"

The new-comer regarded him tenderly for a moment without a word, and then, kicking open the door with an unmistakable wooden leg, stumped into the bar, and grasping his outstretched hand shook it fervently.

"I met Cap'n Peters in Melbourne," said the stranger, as his friend pushed him into his own chair, and questioned him breathlessly. "He told me where you was."

"The sight o' you, Hennery Wiggett, is better to me than diamonds," said Mr. Ketchmaid, ecstatically. "How did you get here?"

"A friend of his, Cap'n Jones, of the barque *Venus*, gave me a passage to London," said Mr. Wiggett, "and I've tramped down from there without a penny in my pocket."

"And Sol Ketchmaid's glad to see you, sir," said Mr. Smith, who, with the rest of the company, had been looking on in a state of great admiration. "He's never tired of telling us 'ow you saved him from the shark and 'ad your leg bit off in so doing."

"I'd 'ave my other bit off for 'im, too," said Mr. Wiggett, as the landlord patted him affectionately on the shoulder and thrust a glass of spirits into his hands. "Cheerful, I would. The kindest-'earted and the bravest man that ever breathed, is old Sol Ketchmaid."

He took the landlord's hand again, and, squeezing it affectionately, looked round the comfortable bar with much approval. They began to converse in the low tones of confidence, and names which had figured in many of the landlord's stories fell continuously on the listeners' ears.

"You never 'eard anything more o' pore Sam Jones, I s'pose?" said Mr. Ketchmaid.

Mr. Wiggett put down his glass.

"I ran up agin a man in Rio Janeiro two years ago," he said, mournfully. "Pore old Sam died in 'is arms with your name upon 'is honest black lips."

"Enough to kill any man," muttered the discomfited Mr. Clark, looking round defiantly upon his murmuring friends.

"Who is this putty-faced swab, Sol?" demanded Mr. Wiggett, turning a fierce glance in the shoemaker's direction.

"He's our cobbler," said the landlord, "but you don't want to take no notice of 'im. Nobody else does. He's a man who as good as told me I'm a liar."

"Wot!" said Mr. Wiggett, rising and stumping across the bar; "take it back, mate. I've only got one leg, but nobody shall run down Sol while I can draw breath. The finest sailor-man that ever trod a deck is Sol, and the best-'earted."

"Hear, hear," said Mr. Smith; "own up as you're in the wrong, Ned."

"When I was laying in my bunk in the fo'c's'le being nursed back to life," continued Mr. Wiggett, enthusiastically, "who was it that set by my side 'olding my 'and and telling me to live for his sake?— why, Sol Ketchmaid. Who was it that said that he'd stick to me for life?— why Sol Ketchmaid. Who was it said that so long as 'e 'ad a crust I should have first bite at it, and so long as 'e 'ad a bed I should 'ave first half of it?— why, Sol Ketchmaid!"

He paused to take breath, and a flattering murmur arose from his listeners, while the subject of his discourse looked at him as though his eloquence was in something of the nature of a surprise even to him.

"In my old age and on my beam-ends," continued Mr. Wiggett, "I remembered them words of old Sol, and I knew if I could only find 'im my troubles were over. I knew that I could creep into 'is little harbour and lay snug. I knew that what Sol said he meant. I lost my leg saving 'is life, and he is grateful."

"So he ought to be," said Mr. Clark, "and I'm proud to shake 'ands with a hero."

He gripped Mr. Wiggett's hand, and the others followed suit. The wooden-legged man wound up with Mr. Ketchmaid, and, disdaining to notice that that veracious mariner's grasp was somewhat limp, sank into his chair again, and asked for a cigar.

"Lend me the box, Sol," he said, jovially, as he took it from him. "I'm going to 'and 'em round. This is my treat, mates. Pore old Henry Wig-gett's treat."

He passed the box round, Mr. Ketchmaid watching in helpless indignation as the customers, discarding their pipes, thanked Mr. Wiggett warmly, and helped themselves to a threepenny cigar apiece. Mr. Clark was so particular

that he spoilt at least two by undue pinching before he could find one to his satisfaction.

Closing time came all too soon, Mr. Wiggett, whose popularity was never for a moment in doubt, developing gifts to which his friend had never even alluded. He sang comic songs in a voice which made the glasses rattle on the shelves, asked some really clever riddles, and wound up with a conjuring trick which consisted in borrowing half a crown from Mr. Ketchmaid and making it pass into the pocket of Mr. Peter Smith. This last was perhaps not quite so satisfactory, as the utmost efforts of the tailor failed to discover the coin, and he went home under a cloud of suspicion which nearly drove him frantic.

"I 'ope you're satisfied," said Mr. Wiggett, as the landlord, having shot the bolts of the front door, returned to the bar.

"You went a bit too far," said Mr. Ketchmaid, shortly; "you should ha' been content with doing what I told you to do. And who asked you to 'and my cigars round?"

"I got a bit excited," pleaded the other.

"And you forgot to tell 'em you're going to start to-morrow to live with that niece of yours in New Zealand," added the landlord.

"So I did," said Mr. Wiggett, smiting his forehead; "so I did. I'm very sorry; I'll tell 'em tomorrow night."

"Mention it casual like, to-morrow morning," commanded Mr. Ketchmaid, "and get off in the arternoon, then I'll give you some dinner besides the five shillings as arranged."

Mr. Wiggett thanked him warmly, and, taking a candle, withdrew to the unwonted luxury of clean sheets and a soft bed. For some time he lay awake in deep thought and then, smothering a laugh with the bed-clothes, he gave a sigh of content and fell asleep.

To the landlord's great annoyance his guest went for a walk next morning and did not return until the evening, when he explained that he had walked too far for his crippled condition and was unable to get back. Much sympathy was manifested for him in the bar, but in all the conversation that ensued Mr. Ketchmaid listened in vain for any hint of his departure. Signals were of no use, Mr. Wiggett merely nodding amiably and raising his glass in response; and when, by considerable strategy, he brought the conversation from pig-killing to nieces, Mr. Wiggett deftly transferred it to uncles and discoursed on pawn-broking.

The helpless Mr. Ketchmaid suffered in silence, with his eye on the clock, and almost danced with impatience at the tardiness of his departing guests. He accompanied the last man to the door, and then, crimson with rage, returned to the bar to talk to Mr. Wiggett.

"Wot d'y'r mean by it?" he thundered.

"Mean by what, Sol?" inquired Mr. Wiggett, looking up in surprise.

"Don't you call me Sol, 'cos I won't have it," vociferated the landlord, standing over him with his fist clenched. "First thing to-morrow morning off you go."

"Off?" repeated the other in amazement. "Off? Where to?"

"Anywhere," said the overwrought landlord; "so long as you get out of here, I don't care where you go."

Mr. Wiggett, who was smoking a cigar, the third that evening, laid it carefully on the table by his side, and regarded him with tender reproach.

"You ain't yourself, Sol," he said, with conviction; "don't say another word else you might say things you'll be sorry for."

His forebodings were more than justified, Mr. Ketchmaid indulging in a few remarks about his birth, parentage, and character which would have shocked an East-end policeman.

"First thing to-morrow morning you go," he concluded, fiercely. "I've a good mind to turn you out now. You know the arrangement I made with you."

"Arrangement!" said the mystified Mr. Wiggett; "what arrangements? Why, I ain't seen you for ten years and more. If it 'adn't been for meeting Cap'n Peters—"

He was interrupted by frenzied and incoherent exclamations from Mr. Ketchmaid.

"Sol Ketchmaid," he said, with dignity, "I 'ope you're drunk. I 'ope it's the drink and not Sol Ketchmaid, wot I saved from the shark by 'aving my leg bit off, talking. I saved your life, Sol, an' I 'ave come into your little harbour and let go my little anchor to stay there till I go aloft to join poor Sam Jones wot died with your name on 'is lips."

He sprang suddenly erect as Mr. Ketchmaid, with a loud cry, snatched up a bottle and made as though to brain him with it.

"You rascal," said the landlord, in a stifled voice. "You infernal rascal. I never set eyes on you till I saw you the other day on the quay at Burnsea, and, just for an innercent little joke like with Ned Clark, asked you to come in and pretend."

"Pretend!" repeated Mr. Wiggett, in a horror-stricken voice. "Pretend! Have you forgotten me pushing you out of the way and saying, 'Save yourself, Sol,' as the shark's jaw clashed together over my leg? Have you forgotten 'ow—?"

"Look 'ere," said Mr. Ketchmaid, thrusting an infuriated face close to his, "there never was a Henery Wiggett; there never was a shark; there never was a Sam Jones!"

"Never— was— a— Sam Jones!" said the dazed Mr. Wiggett, sinking into his chair. "Ain't you got a spark o' proper feeling left, Sol?"

He fumbled in his pocket, and producing the remains of a dirty handkerchief wiped his eyes to the memory of the faithful black.

"Look here," said Mr. Ketchmaid, putting down the bottle and regarding him intently, "you've got me fair. Now, will you go for a pound?"

"Got you?" said Mr. Wiggett, severely; "I'm ashamed of you, Sol. Go to bed and sleep off the drink, and in the morning you can take Henry Wiggett's 'and, but not before."

He took a box of matches from the bar and, relighting the stump of his cigar, contemplated Mr. Ketchmaid for some time in silence, and then, with a serious shake of his head, stumped off to bed. Mr. Ketchmaid remained below, and for at least an hour sat thinking of ways and means out of the dilemma into which his ingenuity had led him.

He went to bed with the puzzle still unsolved, and the morning yielded no solution. Mr. Wiggett appeared to have forgotten the previous night's proceedings altogether, and steadfastly declined to take umbrage at a manner which would have chilled a rhinoceros. He told several fresh anecdotes of himself and Sam Jones that evening; anecdotes which, at the immediate risk of choking, Mr. Ketchmaid was obliged to indorse.

A WEEK passed, and Mr. Wiggett still graced with his presence the bar of the Ship. The landlord lost flesh, and began seriously to consider the advisability of making a clean breast of the whole affair. Mr. Wiggett watched him anxiously, and with a skill born of a life-long study of humanity, realised that his visit was drawing to an end. At last, one day, Mr. Ketchmaid put the matter bluntly.

"I shall tell the chaps to-night that it was a little joke on my part," he announced, with grim decision; "then I shall take you by the collar and kick you into the road."

Mr. Wiggett sighed and shook his head.

"It'll be a terrible show-up for you," he said, softly. "You'd better make it worth my while, and I'll tell 'em this evening that I'm going to New Zealand to live with a niece of mine there, and that you've paid my passage for me. I don't like telling any more lies, but, seeing it's for you, I'll do it for a couple of pounds."

"Five shillings," snarled Mr. Ketchmaid.

Mr. Wiggett smiled comfortably and shook his head. Mr. Ketchmaid raised his offer to ten shillings, to a pound, and finally, after a few remarks which

prompted Mr. Wiggett to state that hard words broke no bones, flung into the bar and fetched the money.

The news of Mr. Wiggett's departure went round the village at once, the landlord himself breaking the news to the next customer, and an overflow meeting assembled that evening to bid the emigrant farewell.

The landlord noted with pleasure that business was brisk. Several gentlemen stood drink to Mr. Wiggett, and in return he put his hand in his own pocket and ordered glasses round. Mr. Ketchmaid, in a state of some uneasiness, took the order, and then Mr. Wiggett, with the air of one conferring inestimable benefits, produced a lucky halfpenny, which had once belonged to Sam Jones, and insisted upon his keeping it.

"This is my last night, mates," he said, mournfully, as he acknowledged the drinking of his health. "In many ports I've been, and many snug pubs I 'ave visited, but I never in all my days come across a nicer, kinder-'earted lot o' men than wot you are."

"Hear, hear," said Mr. Clark.

Mr. Wiggett paused, and, taking a sip from his glass to hide his emotion, resumed.

"In my lonely pilgrimage through life, crippled and 'aving to beg my bread," he said, tearfully, "I shall think o' this 'appy bar and these friendly faces. When I am wrestlin' with the pangs of 'unger and being moved on by the 'eartless police, I shall think of you as I last saw you."

"But," said Mr. Smith, voicing the general consternation, "you're going to your niece in New Zealand?"

Mr. Wiggett shook his head and smiled a sad, sweet smile.

"I 'ave no niece," he said, simply; "I'm alone in the world."

At these touching words his audience put their glasses down and stared in amaze at Mr. Ketchmaid, while that gentleman in his turn gazed at Mr. Wiggett as though he had suddenly developed horns and a tail.

"Ketchmaid told me hisself as he'd paid your passage to New Zealand," said the shoemaker; "he said as 'e'd pressed you to stay, but that you said as blood was thicker even than friendship."

"All lies," said Mr. Wiggett, sadly. "I'll stay with pleasure if he'll give the word. I'll stay even now if 'e wishes it."

He paused a moment as though to give his bewildered victim time to accept this offer, and then addressed the scandalised Mr. Clark again.

"He don't like my being 'ere," he said, in a low voice. "He grudges the little bit I eat, I s'pose. He told me I'd got to go, and that for the look o' things 'e was going to pretend I was going to New Zealand. I was too broke-'earted at the time to care wot he said— I 'ave no wish to sponge on no man— but, seeing

your 'onest faces round me, I couldn't go with a lie on my lips— Sol Ketchmaid, old shipmate— good-bye."

He turned to the speechless landlord, made as though to shake hands with him, thought better of it, and then, with a wave of his hand full of chastened dignity, withdrew. His stump rang with pathetic insistence upon the brick-paved passage, paused at the door, and then, tapping on the hard road, died slowly away in the distance. Inside the Ship the shoemaker gave an ominous order for lemonade.
