PAST MASTERS 163

Ernest M. Poate
E. Phillips Oppenheim
H. Bedford-Jones
William J. Makin
E. M. Delafield
Arthur Conan Doyle
Francis Flagg

and more

PAST MASTERS 163

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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Oswald Crawfurd

1834-1909

In: *The Revelations of Inspector Morgan*, 1906

The first of four Inspector Morgan novellas collected in the above 1906 volume. This one is a substantial 29,000 words.

1: Captain Towers

"I HAVE always considered," said my friend, Inspector Morgan, when he paid me a late after-dinner visit, "I have always considered that the greatest help a detective can have in following up and finding out about a crime is to know something beforehand of the criminal's own private and particular way of looking at things.

"To prove that, I should like to tell you the real story of the great jewel robbery at Balin Abbey, and how the place was broken into by Ikey Coggins, commonly called Grentleman Coggins, alias Towers. You read about it, I dare say, at the time, in the newspapers?"

"I did," I said; "I remember the case vaguely."

"You only read part of the real story; for the general public never got to know more than a little bit of what actually happened. The real story is a very curious one."

"I should like to hear it from you."

"You shall," said the Inspector, "only you must let me tell you about it from the beginning, and in my own way."

Inspector Morgan then told me the following story:

MY FIRST YEARS of services in the army were passed in India and in the Colonies, and when I got my company and came home, I exchanged into a smart cavalry regiment. From that time, things went wrong with me. I had meant, being a comparatively poor man, and very ambitious, to work hard and make a serious career of my profession, and, so far, I had done so; but when I got into the I confess I led a fool's life. Few men can fight against their environment. The regiment was a sporting regiment, and it was quartered in Ireland. Unfortunately for me, I had a fair seat in the saddle, a light hand on the reins, and I could ride under ten stone. My fellow-officers were good fellows and sportsmen. The talk at mess was of nothing but polo, drag-hunts, and steeplechases. I fell into their way. Anything like serious study was

impossible. I bought two polo ponies. I had part ownership in a famous steeplechaser which I had ridden more than once to a win. I lost a good deal more than I could afford at cards. My polo stud was expensive. I was running fast into debt, but I looked to pull myself free at a great race meeting in our near neighbourhood. The two chief events of that meeting were the Hunt Steeplechase, in which I was to ride a friend's hunter, and the Great West of Ireland Handicap, in which my mount was the horse in which I held a part ownership, a very famous steeplechaser, named The Leprochaun. On both events I had laid to win heavily.

Now, I have every reason to believe I should have won both races, paid my debts, pulled myself together, seen what an idiot I had been making of myself, changed into a quieter regiment, and made the army a career and perhaps a successful one. I say I might have done all this but for one man, my evil genius. Captain Towers, who, about this time, came into our regiment. He had done service in the Colonies. No one knew much about him, but he brought with him a reputation as a sportsman and a rider. Towers was fteyer liked at mess. He was a cold, quiet, cynical fellow, with a pale, sinister face, and a horseman's build, broad-shouldered, clean-limbed, strong, spare, and wiry. I saw at once that I had a rival in the saddle, and I was not sorry, for, in point of fact, I had had it too much my own way for the last year or two, being the only man in the regiment who fulfilled all the requirements of a race rider, seat, hand, experience, nerve, and low weight.

The regiment was at that time mad upon bridge, and Towers played a good, quiet game. He had certain rare advantages as a bridge player; he never abused his partner or made cynical remarks; he won without triumphing, and he lost gaily. Not that he lost often, and it was soon observed that no man ever enjoyed so consistent a run of good luck as Captain Towers.

He and I having so much in common were thrown together— but we were never friends. Indeed, I disliked him and distrusted him from the first. He was not a genial fellow. He was a man who never lost a chance of sneering at the four or five things on which men at large do not care to listen to cynical speech— religion, politics, women, social honour, and social honesty. He and I sometimes quarrelled, as two men will when one is quick-tempered and the other coldly cynical. I was fool enough to lend him a hundred pounds when he first came to the regiment, and he had the impudence to look upon my loan to him as the act of a fool. 'Why,' he said, 'you never expected to get it back, did you?'

'You are chaffing, Captain Towers,' I said stiffly.

'Oh,' he said, 'you may call it chaffing if you like; You won't get the money out of me! You haven't my I.O.U.'

'Then,' I said, losing my temper, 'you'll allow me to have my opinion of your conduct, and to let my friends know what I think.'

'Do, and be hanged to you!' he said.

"We parted uncomfortably. What an infernal blackguard! I thought. The great race was still in the far future, when one day Towers came to me and said, over-looking the bad terms we were on, 'Captain Morgan, I want your opinion on a matter in which you know more than I do.'

'What can that be?' I asked, rather amused, for Towers was not, as a rule, over-modest.

'The points of a horse.'

I said nothing, but I thought. What is he driving at now?

'If I had been able to give the right answer to that question, my life would perhaps have been a different life to what it has been.

'The fact is,' he said, 'I am in rather a hole. I got a letter from a friend in Dublin, last week, offering me a chaser for sale— the price was reasonable, the mare young and untried, but she could jump and she could gallop, and I was tempted. "Send her down," I wired. Well, she has come ; she is standing at Simpson's, and, to look at her, she is the greatest brute I ever saw. Come and see her.'

"A lover of horses does not lose a chance of seeing something out of the way in the horse line. Certainly I never saw a less promising animal than the mare in Simpson's stable; ewe-necked, a huge, ugly head, vicious eyes, looking round at us with the whites showing, as we came near the stall.

'Do you see any points about that mare?' asked Towers.

'She has big quarters,' I said. 'She ought to gallop, but her shoidder is straight.'

'She's the devil's own of a temper, your honour,' said the groom, 'when a man's on her back ; and she cries out if she's vexed, like a woman. We call her The Squealer.'

'The Squealer!' said Towers. 'I'll christen her that— she's unnamed as yet— that is, if I keep her. But shall I? Shall I pay her journey back to Dublin and send a fiver and try to be off the bargain?'

Irish grooms are free with their opinions.

'Begorra, sir, I'd send a tenner wid her and make sure.'

'Better see what she can do first,' I said, 'hadn't you? Take her out with the drag-hounds to-morrow.'

'Put a saddle and bridle on her now, Pat, and we'll try her in Simpson's field.'

Irishmen resent the general use of that common patronymic which Englishmen think it knowing and friendly to apply to every Irishman they meet.

'Me name's Terence, with yer honour's leave,' said the groom.

'Is that so? Then, Terence, my man, if you can manage to sit astride of a horse, perhaps you won't mind putting the mare round the field?'

The groom was offended. Every Irishman in or near a stable can ride, and it was clear that Terence had the seat and the hand of a good workman when he was on the mare's back, shoulders well set back, knees forward, hands held low on either side of the mare's withers. Perhaps the ill-humour of the man communicated itself to the mare— for there is no sympathy so close as that between horse and rider— or perhaps, as Terence had said, she had a bad temper of her own. Certainly a more cantankerous mount no man ever had. While she walked, the whites of her wicked eyes and the wrinkling of her nostrils were the only sign, but when Terence put her to a canter, she went short, she bucked, she threw her head up, then put it down to nearly between her knees, and she stopped in her stride to kick.

'By Jove,' I said, 'that fellow can keep his seat!'

'Now we'll try her over the fences,' said Towers.

The outer circle at Simpson's field was a lane of green turf. An inner circle was set with fences to represent the obstacles in a steeplechase or the hunting-field, and was used to test Mr. Simpson's hunters.

The groom put the mare at the first fence. She went at it at ninety miles an hour, stopped suddenly as she came close up, gave a squeal of ill-temper such as I never heard from a horse before, and reared badly.

Towers laughed heartily, while the man was, I could see, in imminent danger of a broken neck.

'Drop the curb, Terence!' I shouted, but the advice came too late. The mare was standing nearly bolt upright, her head straight up in the air. 'Slip off her, man!' I called out, and he did so, just in time to save himself from being crushed. Relieved of his weight, the mare fell to her fore feet again.

'I knew she'd rear if he touched the curb, that's her way,' Towers said, with a broad grin.

'What! You knew that, and you let him ride her on the curb?'

'Pooh! What does a fellow like that signify?'

'The groom had seized the reins and led her back to us.

'Sure the mare's got an imp of Satan inside her to make her want to kill the two of us that way!' said Terence.

'Put on a plain running snaffle,' said Towers, 'and I'll try her.'

'You're risking your neck, Towers, for no good. She's a brute, and you'll make nothing of her for hunting or racing. Send her back, even if you lose money by it.'

"He did not listen to me, and presently he was on the mare's back.

'I want to let her extend herself and see if she can gallop.'

She went freer in the snaffle as Towers galloped her round the outer circle. She seemed though to go a little short for a racer, showing no indications whatever of any remarkable turn of speed. I have had good reason since to suspect that Towers, a clever rider, took particularly good care not to put the mare, as the saying is, 'on the stretch.'

When Towers rode at the fences, the mare's behaviour was quite changed. She went round the ring at a slow canter, taking every fence, large and small, in her stride, and taking them well and easily.

'What do you think of that?' said Captain Towers, as he brought the mare back to us.

'Bedad, sir,' said Terence, putting in his say, 'when she's in that humour she'd be the very mount for a nervous old gentleman who loves a quiet day with hounds.'

'What do you think of her, Captain Morgan?'

'I agree with Terence, and I don't think she has the making of a racer in her. Did you try to extend her just now?'

'All she'd let me,' said Towers,

'I'd send her back to Dublin, if you'd care to have my advice,' said I.

'Wid fifteen golden sovereigns tied to her tail!' sugggested Terence.

'I'll take your advice, Morgan.'

When I next spoke to Towers about the mare it was three days afterwards, and he looked vexed.

'Would you believe it? They've stuck me with that infernal mare! The man refused to be off his bargain at any price, and now I've got her on my hands.'

'A white elephant! Shall you put her in training?'

'Is she worth it?'

Towers never did put the mare into regular training— he never even let her be properly clipped or singed, and as the winter came on her coat grew ragged and her fetlocks were left untrimmed. He took her out once or twice with the hounds, and he entered her regularly at the drag meets, but though she jumped cleverly she was never forward with hounds, and she never came near winning the drag.

Needless to say he and his unfortunate purchase came in for a good deal of chaff at mess. He took it in fairly good part, and defended the mare. 'The more I know her,' he said, 'the more I like her. She has a temper and is too lazy to gallop, but I believe she can.'

'Not with that shape, my dear fellow,' said Major O'Gorman, a keen sportsman, but too stout to ride his own horses on the turf. 'A horse wants

shoulders to land him as well as hind legs to send him forward, and your mare has shoulders like a sheep's.'

'You know more of horses than I do,' said Towers almost humbly.

'Not difficult,' said O'Gorman behind his moustache. But Towers did not hear, or pretended not to hear.

'I'd back her even now,' said Towers, 'over a stiff course against some horses I could name.'

The weakness we all have for our own property blinds the wisest of us! and we were a little sorry even for Towers when we saw O'Gorman's eagerness to take him at his word. It was a little over-sharp of O'Gorman, we thought, upon the newcomer.

'Do you mean any of my lot, Captain Towers? because if you mean that, I'll do business with you.'

'I suppose it's cheek of me, but I did mean The Clipper.'

There was a peal of laughter at the mess table.

'Owners up?' suggested Towers, and the laugh turned against the red-faced, burly major.

'Certainly not,' said O'Gorman; 'you know I never ride my own horses. I'll put Morgan up.'

'Then I must choose the course!' said Towers sharply and decisively.

O'Gorman suspected a trap and hesitated. 'Four miles of fair hunting country?' he suggested.

'Quite so,' answered Towers, 'and I to chose it.'

So the matter was agreed upon for £100 a side. The Clipper was a clever chaser who had won many a hurdle race and many a local steeplechase. He was thought even to have a good chance against The Leprochaun for the Great West of Ireland Race, having to receive no less than 11 lbs. from that famous crack. The Clipper could gallop and could jump, and if his jumping was not always very free, that would not matter in a match when he could follow a lead over every fence, for his great turn of speed would enable him to beat nearly any hone in the last run in.

'There was little betting till the last, so hollow a thing did the race seem, and so foregone a conclusion its result. At the last, among the few hundred of sporting men from the neighbourhood and officers from the garrison, almost any odds could have been obtained against Towers' mare. He himself, already in the saddle, in his jockey cap and jacket, went among the crowd and was received with chaff and laughter. 'What odds do you want?' they asked him.

'What offer?' Towers called out.

One man in derision offered ten to one. Towers shook his head and laughed. The other raised his offer to 25 to 1, and the Captain, saying 'Done with you!' booked the bet in tenners.

Others followed half in fun, half in the wish to make a sovereign or two out of the match, and before Towers and I stood at the starting-point he must have booked over a thousand pounds in bets. He asked me, as we stood waiting for the start, if I would give him the current odds, but I wouldn't take advantage of him.

A match between a fast horse who is not a safe and ready fencer and a slower horse who can jump is generally a very dull affair. My riding orders were simple. 'Follow Towers' lead over every fence and race in from the last,' O'Gorman had said. I did as I was bid, and the race was conducted mostly at a walk. The fences were big and various ; doubles, bullfinches, a stiff post and rail. A big flying leap at a brook, the last jump before the finish was also a brook, but quite a narrow one, not more than 12 feet of water with a good take off and landing. The brook lay at the bottom of a slope, so that, coming at it, we had a good view of the water, and it looked bigger than it was. I could see why Towers had insisted upon choosing the course. The Clipper, like most horses, preferred any kind of jump to water. If he refused anything, he would refuse a water jump, but O'Gorman's riding orders had provided for this, and with a lead over the fences there was no danger of his refusing anything. The most refusing of jumpers will always follow another horse over a fence.

Towers and I went over the course at our ease, chaffing each other. He gave me a good lead over the big brook, and then pulled up in the middle of the field to let me follow and rejoin him.

'There's no use my trying to get away from you,' he said, 'is there? By Jove, The Clipper is a clipper, and no mistake ; and my last chance is gone, I suppose, if he can do water like that. Come along!'

I really thought the race was over and was admiring Towers' pluck. He was always a good loser.

We were coming back in a great four-mile circle to the starting-field where the crowd stood and where also was the winning-post not more than 500 yards from the last fence, the brook before mentioned.

We rode pretty fast at it, nearly side by side. The Clipper only half a length behind Towers' mare. I could see the green winning flags, beyond the two red ones which marked the spot where we were to take the brook, and I was already pulling myself together for the effort to race in.

We were within five yards of the water when Towers' mare showed her temper— or perhaps was made to. She stopped dead short at the edge of the water, gave the strange squeal I had heard before, and began to rear.

I jammed The Clipper at the little brook, but the sight of the water, or more probably the unexpected refusal of the mare whom he had been following, scared him. He stuck his fore feet obstinately together at the take off, and then swerved suddenly some twenty yards to the left.

As I made a half circle to put my horse again at the jump, I could not well see what Towers was about, but they told me afterwards that what happened was this:

The mare almost immediately came down from her rear, and Towers, who, by-the-bye, carried no whip and wore no spurs, without turning back, urged his mare to take the brook standing. She did so at once, with so big a bound as surprised the lookers on, and then she began to canter very slowly up the slope towards the winning-post.

I put The Clipper fast at the brook; he took it splendidly, and, seeing the slow pace of The Squealer, I made no doubt of overtaking her, but Towers, looking round, saw me coming up and mended his own pace. We raced in, I was overtaking him fast, I had reached his mare's quarters, then the saddle, then her neck, amid shouts of 'The Clipper wins! The Clipper wins!' but Towers squeezed past the post, a winner by half a head! There was a moment's silence among the onlookers, so unexpected was the issue of the race. Then in a moment came a great huzzaing for Captain Towers. He became at once the hero of the crowd and his win the cleverest bit of jockey ship ever seen on an Irish racecourse.

Was it accident, or was it design? Had the mare's temper prevailed for a moment, or had Towers induced it at the critical moment? The crowd never doubted but that Towers had managed the whole thing, nor, to be sure, did I or any one who saw the race run and knew Towers, have the slightest doubt on the subject. The ethics of horse-racing are not very strict, and a trick of this sort is held to be fair by the majority of racing men. Even O'Gorman laughed over his loss, like the good sportsman and gentleman he was, and was seen to shake hands openly on the course with the winner of the match— whereat the Irish crowd cheered both gentlemen heartily.

This affair, however, did not increase Captain Towers' reputation in the regiment. The race might be all right, but that long-continued belittling of an animal that if she could only gallop fairly well could at least jump superbly. Many of us, too, had lost considerably to him at cards. Good as his play was, it was not enough to justify his almost constant winning at bridge, and some of the more suspicious among us began to make unpleasant remarks, and one or two of the heaviest losers were so convinced of the unfairness of his play that they set themselves to watch him. They found, of course, nothing. Towers was a most scrupulous player, he always called attention to a player who held his

hand carelessly. His own eyes never travelled beyond his own hand and the cards on the table. It was noticed that he was clumsy in handling the pack, that he shuffled and cut awkwardly, dealing slowly, and carrying his hand, as some old-fashioned players do, with every card dealt, and dealing them into four regular little heaps on the table. The watchers noted all this, and then gave up watching him as a bad job.

'It's all luck,' said some of us. 'He'll make up for his run of luck some day, somehow'— a prediction which came true in the end, but not quite in the way the prophets had meant.

Rather to our surprise, after the exhibition of lack of speed which The Squealer had made in the match with The Clipper, Towers had entered his mare for the two chief events in the Great West of Ireland Race meeting— namely, for the Hunters' Sweepstakes, for which The Squealer had qualified, and for the Great West of Ireland Race. We could not quite make this out, for the mare could not have a chance in the Hunt Steeplechase even though no better horse than The Clipper ran in it, and I had every reason to believe The Clipper would win the race. I had backed him heavily. That Towers should put his mare into the Great West of Ireland Handicap, that he should enter such an animal as The Squealer against all the best chasers in Ireland, and among them against the famous Leprochaun, seemed nothing short of madness. Yet there were some of us who, after Towers' exploit against The Clipper, were quite willing to take long odds against The Squealer for both races. Towers was one of them. He said he thought he might win. He laid freely against any horse in the race, and took all the long odds that he could get against his own mount. By the day of the race he had a book which must have totalled over ten thousand pounds.

"I WILL NOT tell you the story of that day's racing," said Inspector Morgan. "Even now the memory of it is too unpleasant and the feeling I have against that swindling scoundrel too bitter. Enough to say that Towers won both races."

WHEN he appeared on the course in his preliminary canter, on his ragged-coated mare, with her ewe neck, her ugly head, and her shambling, lurching gallop, a shout of derision went up among the racecourse crowd, and the usual cheap wit was indulged in:

'How much the pound. Captain?' 'What price cat's meat to-day?' 'Take her home and cut her hair, sir, do!'

When the race began and they saw her take every fence as if it was playtime with her, keep her place in the first rank, and that although the race

was being run at the usual break-neck pace of modem steeplechases, an unaccustomed silence fell upon the crowd. Towers and I were again alone, every other horse in the race having either fallen or been outpaced. This time we rode abreast, and I took no lead. The Clipper was full of go to-day, and full of courage, facing every jump and clearing everything safely and well. We raced hard over the last sweep three fields off the finish, and took the last three jumps simultaneously and abreast. I could not shake off the mare : we were neck and neck. I plied whip and spurs, and the brave beast responded, but I could not get past Towers, and, almost at the post. The Squealer forged ahead, and won the race by a narrow half length.

Amid the shouting of the crowd and the congratulations of brother sportsmen, Towers kept his usual cool cynicism as he was being led back to the weighing yard. He caught sight of O'Gorman's red face in the lane of sportsmen through which he was being led.

'I told you, O'Gorman,' he said quietly, 'that I thought the mare might have a turn of speed in her.'

The history of the great race of the day was the history of the Hunt race over again. The mare never made a mistake at her fences, never seemed to exert herself, and Captain Towers drew alongside of me on The Leprochaun, and raced that famous chaser over the last few hundred yards, beating him as he had beaten The Clipper by the narrowest of distances at the post.

That race was the end of my army career. I was in debt far beyond my solvency. I had lost some hundreds at cards, and my chances of recouping myself at the race meeting had been hindered by Captain Towers and his mysterious mare.

It was not quite the end of Towers' career, but it was the beginning of the end. It was not till all racing debts had been paid to him and done with, that scnnething happened which was to solve the problem of The Squealer and how she had come to beat the best horses in Ireland, but another rather startling event was to happen first, and this also led to unexpected developments.

Captain Towers' exploits on the turf had made him famous, and in sporting circles outside our mess he was even popular, for he had other claims to society success. He was musical and had a capital voice, and he was beyond compare the best amateur actor I have ever known. His specialty was what on the stage is known as character parts, old men, particularly foreign old men, when he would make up and talk in a way to make one entirely forget his own individuality. The complicated Jew nature he seemed to have studied as few men have— when and where I could never guess. He impersonated Shylock once in the trial scene from *The Merchant of Venice*. Portia, the Duke, Bassanio, and Antonio were all forgotten. We had eyes and ears for him alone.

In a silly melodrama which the Amateur Dramatists of the garrison town played in for a charity. Towers had been asked to choose his part. He chose, to the surprise of every one, the character of 'Ikey Moses,' a young Cockney Jew, dealer in old clothes, who, in some way, comes into collision with the noble Christian hero of the piece and gets the worse of the encounter. His part consisted only of a dozen or two of words, but they were delivered at rehearsals with such an unctuous roll of the lips, such a broad and humorous accent, half Cockney, half Yiddish, that our stage-manager— a professional— suggested a little writing up of the part. At the next rehearsal Towers had put in a few lines and delivered them with marvellous effect. The whole company applauded and entreated him to work on, upon the same lines. At every rehearsal the part grew. Ikey Moses was from the first a ridiculous, somewhat hateful character— mean, subservient to his superiors, a bully to his inferiors— spurned by the low-bom heroine, to whom he presumes to offer his obnoxious addresses. Towers with great skill preserved all the mean and ridiculous elements in the character, but he converted the Jew's presumptuous courting of the heroine into a genuine love. The better elements in the man were seen to be fighting against his baser side. There was the true dramatic struggle and contention of passion with passion. Pathos and even tragedy were latent in the struggle. The part extended day by day till at last it literally filled the play. It was the play— the parts of the leading gentleman and lady were ruthlessy cut down, and when the piece came to be acted, Ikey Moses, with his comic lisp, his mixture of knowingness, knavery, and simplicity, was on the stage during nearly the whole of the four acts, and there was a scene between him and his sweetheart while he pleads, and she half pities, half despises him, and finally rejects him, which stirred the house to unwonted tragic depths. Towers was cheered when he came on and when he went off, and when the curtain fell it was amid a tiunult of applause.

I mention this to show what a versatile and accomplished fellow Towers was, and also because his mimetic powers have a distinct relation to something I shall have to tell you presently. With all these talents, enough to raise any man to a pinnacle of success in almost any line of life, there was in Towers an instinct towards evil, that demoniac tendency which drives men to their doom, that mysterious, little understood impulse which lies deep at the heart of every great criminal, the tendency to set evil above good which finally destroys the man's soul.

"NOW," Morgan went on, "I must tell you of the incident which led to the first of a series of catastrophes in Towers' military career. I have told you how he systematically won at cards, and how, though we all began to suspect him

of foul play, we never could find anything to justify any suspicions. The cards he played with belonged to the mess, and were procured in the usual way by the mess committee for the time being. Towers went on winning, and we had no excuse but to go on playing with him."

THERE was one young fellow among us who did not take it so calmly— Terence O'Grady, a hot-headed young Tipperary giant— a good fellow, popular among us all, a distant relative of my own, and a man whom I loved as a brother. He had lost night after night when he played against Towers, and won only when he found himself Towers' partner.

'I know the beggar cheats!' he cried out.

'Hush !' said an older ofiicer. 'You can't prove it, whatever you think, and you'd best hold your tongue till you're sure.'

'Then I'll make sure!' said O'Grady. 'I'll pin him, sir, never fear but I'll pin him!'

We laughed at this vague threat— not for a moment guessing what he meant by his vague threat of pinning Captain Towers.

That night O'Grady and I played against Towers and O'Gorman. It happened that every one of the three of us had already, in previous play, lost heavily to Towers— O'Gorman in particular, and O'Grady far more than he could afford. Towers dealt. We watched with an ill-defined suspicion the slow and deliberate movements of the dealer. We always expected something fantastic in the way of a declaration when Towers dealt, but this time it surprised me to find that he declared no trumps, for, sitting third hand, I held seven hearts to the Quart Major in my own hand. I immediately redoubled, and, to my surprise, Towers redoubled again. Knowing that my partner would follow the 'heart convention' and play me a heart, I doubled again, and on a seeming certainty, and so it went on to the extreme limit. Eventually we stood to win or lose 100 points on each trick.

What was my surprise when O'Grady failed to lead a heart. He had none. Towers easily discarded the few hearts in his own hand, kept the lead, my hearts never came in, and we lost the whole thirteen tricks, Grand Slam!

'Now,' thought I, 'how could Towers possibly have dared to redouble and to continue to redouble, unless he had felt sure that O'Grady, with the blind lead, had not a single heart in his hand? How could he have known this by any fair means? He could not even have caught a chance glance at O'Grady's hand, for that young Irishman is short-sighted, and never holds his cards more than three inches from his nose.

I looked at O'Gorman, who is a fine player. He wore a very grave look. I saw he had arrived at the same conclusion as I had. Indeed, it was too obvious to miss. O'Grady's face worked. I thought he meant mischief.

The score was marked down, Towers cut for O'Grady and the game went on with varied success till the turn came again for Towers to deal.

'Hearts,' said Towers, after a glance at his hand.

He laid his cards in a neat heap on the table, sat back and waited for developments ; as he did so, he rested both hands for a moment on his knees. It is an ordinary action which I have seen many an innocent bridge-player adopt, but it suggested foul doings to O'Grady.

'May I play?' he asked me, but his voice was choked with some strong emotion.

'Yes,' I answered, and Towers raised his hands from the table and proceeded to take up his cards. In the moment of his doing so, and before he could touch the cards, O'Grady shot out his right hand and grasped Towers by the wrist so strongly that he could not move it. O'Grady was a fellow of prodigious strength.

Poor O'Grady's feat was a poor parody of the old story of the man who pierces the sharper's hand to the table with a dagger and offers to apologise if there is not a card beneath it.

'I'll make you my apologies. Captain Towers,' says O'Grady, 'if you don't hold a fake card in your hand.'

As is usual in such catastrophes, there was a moment's silence. Towers, though he could not disengage his hand, could turn it, and he did so, and showed that it was empty.

'You young idiot !' O'Gorman called out. 'Let go! No one cheats at bridge that way.'

O'Grady, out of countenance, withdrew his hand, but, before he had quite done so. Towers had clenched his left hand, and, half raising himself from his seat, brought his fift with prodigious force full on O'Grady's temple. As the young Irishman's right arm and shoulder were extended, his head inclined somewhat away from the shoulder, and the temple lying flat to the blow, received it full and without a glance. O'Grady groaned, his head dropped forward— he had been felled, as an ox is felled, by the terrible force of the blow delivered by an angry man.

'You brute!' I said, but I felt, as I said it, that the provocation almost justified the assault.

'I presume the rubber is over for the present,' said O'Gorman, cold-bloodedly. 'I'll gather up the cards,' he added, and he proceeded to put them together in the order they lay on the table and placed them in his pocket.

Towers had left the room.

'Do you feel any better yet, O'Grady, my boy?' asked O'Gorman, but the young Irishman lay still. 'Give him time,' said O'Gorman, 'and a spoonful of whisky, but I say, what a biceps that fellow must have to deliver such a smasher, eh !'

I was dragging O'Grady's lifeless form to a sofa, helped by O'Grorman, and presently we forced a drop or two of raw whisky between his lips.

He opened his eyes.

'I pinned him, didn't I?' he asked, 'and then I seem to forget. What happened then?'

'What naturally would,' said O'Gorman. 'You lay hold of a man's hand and suggest that he cheats, and he hits you hard over the ear.'

'I'll have him out for it!' says O'Grady.

'No you won't, my boy. It's tit for tat, and that's good law all the world over.'

'My head aches infernally,' muttered the young man, 'but I'll have him out on the field and shoot him.'

'We'll have the blackguard into court first, and get him time and hard labour for cheating at cards '

'Then we've found him out.'

O'Gorman went to the door and locked it. 'Look here, you two,' he said, and he took the pack of cards out of his pocket and spread them, face up, on the card-table. He counted out the first thirteen. 'There, that was Towers' hand. This is O'Grady's,' and he counted a second thirteen. 'This is mine, his diunmy, and this is Morgan's. Now you heard him call hearts, didn't you? Let us see what he did it on. See here. Captain Morgan, he had just three hearts in his hand, knave, ten, and four, with some strength in the three other suits. Does any sane man declare hearts with only three of the suit in his hand? Never. But he might if he happened to know that his dummy holds five hearts.'

'How could he guess that?'

'By some devil's cantrip, sir ! That's his secret, Captain Morgan, and Satan's, his master!'

The thing had gone beyond a mess scandal. It was made a matter of regimental inquiry. Just about this time, too, ugly rumours began to circulate as to Towers' doings on the turf. The Colonel had received anonymous letters, of which he took at first no notice, alleging that Towers' mare, entered under the name of The Squealer as a six-year-old, was in fact a well-known steeplechaser named The Scapegoat, who had run in the Grand National at Liverpool two years before, and had come very near to winning that important event. A letter from a friend of the Colonel's, a well-known Irish sportsman,

testified to the same effect. He had had his suspicions aroused, he said, on the day of the race, but not being sure, for the mare's coat was ragged and her appearance changed, he had held his tongue. It was not till some time had passed that he and a companion had examined the mare in Simpson's stables and he had found his suspicions confirmed. It was The Scapegoat sure enough. The mare's teeth had been tampered with, she bore 'mark of mouth' at variance with the length of her teeth, and that mark had evidently been ^f aked. Moreover, there was a conspicuous scar on the coronet of the off hind leg of The Scapegoat which was hidden by the unusual growth of hair on the fetlocks of Captain Towers' mare. This mark was looked for and found on the animal in Simpson's stable.

On this evidence Towers was summoned before a Regimental Court of Inquiry and required to give an explana-tion. He was also called upon to explain the incidents during the bridge rubber, interrupted by the action of Lieutenant O'Grady. He had no excuse to offer for his redoubling "No Trumps" and declaring 'hearts' with only three of that suit in his hand, except that he always played a forward, dashing game, and found it a winning one. As to his mare, he denied that she was anything but a young mare rising six, and declared that a friend had picked her up for him in a Dublin livery stable.

The inquiry was adjourned for further expert testimony. A Dublin vet. deposed that the mare's mouth had been 'faked,' that the length of her teeth indicated her age to be not less than eight. At that age the depression in the corner teeth of a horse, known as 'mark of mouth,' has disappeared for more than a twelvemonth. The mare indeed possessed 'mark of mouth,' but it was easy to see that it was a mark which had been produced by artificial means.

Captain Towers being asked to explain why he had failed to singe or clip the mare and thus let her run at disadvantage to herself with half her winter coat on, replied that he was opposed to excessive removal of a horse's natural covering.

Asked if the growth of hair allowed to grow on her fetlocks was not designed by him to conceal a scar or blemish on the mare's coronet, Captain Towers said the same answer would apply as he had made to the court's former question.

An eminent detective officer had been brought from Scotland Yard, an expert in the ways of card-sharping. On being told of the circumstances of the last rubber played by Captain Towers, the detective asked for the packs that had been used. He examined the cards carefully, picked out sixteen cards from each pack, looking only at the backs, and dealt them into two heaps, face downwards on the table, at which the officers on the inquiry were sitting.

We looked at Captain Towers. For the first time his assumed smile left him and he showed some emotion. He had turned pale.

'You will probably find, gentlemen,' said Inspector Medlicott, 'that these two heaps consist of the whole suit of hearts and the three remaining aces. He turned up the cards and it proved to be as he said. There lay exposed all four aces and all the hearts in each pack.

He handed the bundle of sixteen cards to the President.

'You will see nothing, sir, in these cards unless you look with a powerful magnifying glass, and you will feel nothing, but the man who takes the precaution of slightly rubbing down the skin of the ball of the thumb and of his second finger with pumice stone, and so increasing the sensibility of the skin, can perceive in handling the cards that each ace has received the prick of a fine needle point, moving from face to back, and all the hearts similar pricks, from back to front— the pricks in the case of the hearts varying in number according to the value of the card. Now that supplies information enough to a good player to enable him to win heavily on every rubber.'

Inspector Medlicott gathered up the cards of one pack into his hand, shuffled them and turned to the President.

'If you will allow me, sir, to deal this pack, as if I were the dealer at a gaine of bridge, I will show you the *modus operandi* of the swindler at the game of bridge.'

'Certainly, Mr. Inspector,' said the Colonel from the head of the board table, 'do as you say.'

Every one in the room was a bridge player, and we watched the movements of the detective with deep interest. I glanced at the accused.

He had turned to a death-like pallor.

'This,' said Inspector Medlicott, is how a card-sharper, using these needle-marked cards, would probably deal.'

He dealt the cards and, to my astonishment, he exactly repeated the slow method of dealing practised by Captain Towers— the hand in each case following the card and laying each card, in its turn, on its respective heap.

'By so doing,' said the inspector, 'the ball of the thumb and of the second finger have time to come into contact with the prick marks on each card.'

The cards now lay in four heaps on the table.

'I am able now to tell you, sir,' said Inspector Medlicott, looking to the President, 'that I have dealt two aces to my dummy and one to each of my adversaries. I have, as it happens, given myself four good hearts; there are five small hearts in my dummy's hand, and my adversaries have each two. I should accordingly declare hearts on this deal though I have only four in the suit, and am quite sure to win heavily.'

He turned up the cards and showed that he had correctly described them.

The evidence was conclusive.

We looked at Captain Towers. He had covered his face with his hands. A report of the inquiry was forwarded to headquarters, and Captain Towers was ordered to submit himself to a court martial or quit the service.

But Towers did not wait for any instructions from headquarters. He disappeared suddenly from our midst. The day following the inquiry he was gone. He had left numerous creditors behind, which we thought the more iniquitous, as his short career among us had left him a winner at cards and on the turf of over £16,000. He had never repaid advances made by O'Gorman, O'Grady, and myself. Simpson had an unpaid bill of £60 against him with the mare as set-off, but a steeplechaser whose teeth have been tampered with is not a very realisable asset, and he was glad to take £100 from Major O'Gorman for the animal, with the understanding that the balance was to be paid to any legal claimant who might turn up.

'I will observe that the mare's bad temper was a fiction of Towers'. She had nothing wrong with her but a delicate mouth, and the touch of the curb was an agony to her that caused her to rear. She became O'Gorman's favourite hunter, and won him many a race, but she had to carry weight in consideration of her previous performances as The Scapegoat, her old name, which was honestly restored to her.

"A terrible catastrophe followed Towers' disappearance. If he had not entirely ruined me, he was the actual sole cause of the ruin of my poor young kinsman. Lieutenant O'Grady. He had borrowed money from O'Grady when he had any to lend, won from him at cards and, we now knew, cheated him, besides inducing him to make absurd books on horse-races with him. O'Grady was irretrievably insolvent. He came of a family of good and honourable soldiers. He felt that honour soiled and sullied, and on the day following Towers' departure, O'Grady blew his brains out.

I shall never forget our meeting after the funeral. We swore among us that if ever the chance presented itself we would be even with the cold-blooded villain Towers. It has happened that I alone among us was able to redeem that oath.

I cannot lay all the blame of my own misfortunes upon Captain Towers. Some of it at least was due to my own stupidity and my own extravagance.

I could only just pay my debts and I was nearly a pauper, with no chances left. My purpose was to enlist in some regiment going to India or the Colonies. I mentioned my intention to Inspector Medlicott, as a man of wide experience, to whose society I had taken a fancy.

'Don't do anything so rash with your life, sir,' he said. 'Don't waste it— 'you've had your lesson. You've learnt a lot without knowing that you've learnt anything. Go where you can use what you have learnt.'

'And where's that, Mr. Inspector? I am too old and ignorant of business for an office, and I don't know any situation where they have any use for the sort of thing I know.'

'Come to us,' said the Inspector, 'work your way up from the ranks. It's more interesting than soldiering, and quite as dangerous.'

This is how I came to enter the detective force, and I never have regretted taking Inspector Medlicott's advice. Nevertheless, I did not take it quite at once. It is a big jump from being an officer in a smart cavalry regiment to the rank and file of the Force at Scotland Yard. I hesitated for a time and tried other ways, but I need dwell no longer at present upon that interval in my career.

2: The Great Jewel Robbery at Balin Abbey

'YOU began, Mr. Morgan, 'I said, 'by telling me of that you would give me some account of the great jewel robbery at Balin Abbey, and the burglar you call Gentleman Coggins."

'I have been telling you about Gentleman Coggins,' said Inspector Morgan, 'all along. Captain Towers and Gentleman Coggins are one and the same person.'

'What!' I said, "an officer in the army turned London burglar! Towers sank so low as that, did he?'

'Don't say "sank," ' said Morgan, laughing, 'say rather he rose. There is rank in crime as in every other profession. No man stands so high as Coggins— Ikey Coggins. Captain Towers, who cheated us all at cards and won those thousands of pounds on the turf and then let himself be found out, is not be named in rank and social position with Ikey Coggins— alias Conkey Coggins— alias Gentleman Coggins. He stands at the head of his profession in Great Britain. He has been suspected and watched by the police for years, and never once been nabbed, never once been sent to gaol, never once even been brought before a court of justice. It is a proud position!' The Inspector smiled.

'Did he go at once from soldiering to burglary?' I asked.

'No,' said Morgan. "Captain Towers went first to America. After a short and successful career in that country, finding it got too hot to hold him, he got killed in an accident."

I laughed— 'A sham accident, I presume.'

'No, the accident was serious enough. One of the biggest things of the kind in America of that season. Sixty drowned, forty burned to death, and over a hundred injured for life, but I don't suppose Towers was anywhere near the place where it happened. I have kept the announcement of his death in the *Morning Post*. It is a curiosity.

The Inspector drew from his pocket a newspaper cutting and read aloud:

Obituary Notice. We regret to announce the death, in the recent accident on the Wabash & Susquehanna Railway, America, of Captain Towers, late of H.M.... The great success of Captain Towers as a gentleman rider on the Irish Turf, his fine horsemanship and his phenomenal winnings will be in the recollection of our readers. Captain Towers was not only a gentleman rider of remarkable skill, but a sportsman of rare integrity. His winning of a fortune on the Irish Turf was the immediate cause of his honourable retirement from the British Army. The sudden melancholy demise of Captain Towers has cut short what promised to become a very brilliant sporting career in the United States, where he leaves many admiring friends.

'The fact is,' said Inspector Morgan, 'that Pinkerton's police were hot upon his scent, and he bolted over here, under a false name, just in time to save himself. He had won quite a lot of American money.'

'He must have been a rich man with his winnings on both sides of the water.'

'Yes, but not too rich for the position he aspired to take up in the profession.'

'What!' I said. 'It takes capital to set up as a London burglar?'

'A very large capital. That is, if you have ambition to take rank. Recollect, too, it is one of the most lucrative professions in the world. Great lawyers, great surgeons, great jockeys, are not in it with great burglars. When you may look to net from £50 to £200,000 a year, you must not stint in preliminary expenses.'

'I don't really see, Mr. Morgan, what a burglar can require beyond a set of burglary tools, a pair of list slippers, a mask, a dark lantern, a revolver, and perhaps a few skeleton keys and centre-bits.'

Morgan smiled. "That is not enough for the modern professional. It was all very well for the old-fashioned cracksman. The modern burglar leads a double life. He passes half his time in society— of a kind— the other half among his pals. He has to keep in his pay an army of retainers as large as a mediaeval baron. Some of them are his agents, some his spies, half the criminal classes in town are his pensioners, and good pay, too, they get, for if he give less than the police offer, the rascals would betray him at once. Then he has to pay for the defence in court of his agents when they get caught. I calculate that a man

in the position of Ikey Coggins, lately Captain Towers, does not pay away less than twelve or fifteen thousand a year.'

'And it pays him to do that?"

'Handsomely. Why, a single haul like the one at Balin Abbey must have brought in not far short of £100,000. Even the papers said £60,000, but ladies, we find, invariably lessen their losses in these cases.'

'Was Towers' name mentioned in the case? I don't remember his name in the papers.'

'He was only known among us as Coggins. His identity with Captain Towers did not come out at the trial. No one but four or five persons can know the truth about it. Of course, my chiefs at the office know, for I told them.'

'Is it to be a secret still?'

'I don't see that it's any use making a secret of it any longer. It's ancient history now. Certainly not to you, who are, if you will allow me to call you so, a brother official and something of a colleague.'

'You honour me, Morgan, by calling me so. But tell me this story of the jewel robbery if it's fresh in your memory. It's anything but fresh in mine.'

'It is in mine. It was my first big job, and it won my inspectorship for me.'

'Then, please, Mr. Morgan, tell me the story, and tell it in your own way. I don't know a better. You give the length and breadth and look of things and let me see their working out, so that I could do it all myself if I wanted to. I never get that sort of thing in books. I suppose it's a detective's way of telling a story to his brother detective.'

'I suppose it may be that," said Inspector Morgan.

'We know the importance of detail. One nail-hole in a footprint on a dusty road may make all the difference between finding our man or losing him.'

I interrupted him as he was beginning his story.

'One thing I want to know first. You said the swindler Towers, who had given himself out as dead in that name, was leading a double life in London. Surely he has not come to life again and resumed his own name?'

Morgan paused. 'Well, he is undoubtedly living a double life. That is certain, for "Coggins" disappears from time to time, but, so to say, his life activity goes on.

'And what's his new name? What is his other life?"

'The answer to that question,' said Inspector Morgan, 'is the answer to the problem I set myself to discover. You will see that I did discover it. More by a strange sort of accident than by any cleverness of mine it came out. That he kept his secret so long was due to his wonderful talent.'

'You mean that the police knew Coggins and could lay their hands on him when they would, but the other life of the man was a mystery to them?'

'Just so, and what was the good of arresting Coggins? He managed that there should never be a scrap of evidence against him, though we know he was behind every big thing in London and 100 miles round London.

"Why, when Balin Abbey was broken into, Coggins was at Pangford, eight miles away, and our fellows had been there watching him for a week. He was staying at the Balin Arms at Pangford as Monsieur Dubois, travelling for a Lyons silk firm and booking a good many orders for silk skirtings and dress pieces. The man wais the life and soul of the Commercial Room, speaking fluent English with a French accent and singing French songs to the piano in the travellers' room! What can you do with such a fellow!'

'What made your people watch him?'

'We had got notice from trustworthy sources that he had gone to crack a crib, as they call it, on the outskirts of Pangford. We had three good men on the watch, Sergeant Smith and two others under him, and they reported that he was seen at odd hours to be watching and studying this particular house— a retired manufacturer's villa.'

'A blind, I suppose?'

'Not exactly; the house was broken into the very night following the affair at Balin Abbey, when every one was full of that, and the fellow got off with £5,000 in plate and jewellery. The burglary, however, could not be traced to Coggins, though of course we suspected him.

'It was the day after the great affair at the Abbey that my chief sent for me. 'There is something going on down in Somersetshire,' he said, Vhich beats us all. Coggins is in it. I can tell you that much, but I can tell you no more. We are going to give you a chance of unravelling matters.'

'Stop, Morgan,' I said. 'Pray, did your chief know or did you guess that Coggins and Towers were the same person?'

'He did not and I did not— at that time. All we knew of Coggins was that he was a burglaring luminary of the first order, who had come from nowhere about four years before and had beaten all our best men.'

'Please go on. Forgive me for interrupting. I won't again.'

Morgan continued:

'THE CASE,' said my chief, when I went before him, 'is peculiar, and we are taking unusual measures to come at the truth. The facts, as we know them, are these — (Forget what you have read in the newspapers, the reporters have got hold of some things by the wrong end). The plain facts are these:

'Lord and Lady Balin were entertaining a house party at the Abbey some days ago. On the 23d of this month of January there was a big shoot on. The day was fine, dry and frosty ; the wind got up at night and some rain had

fallen. The ladies joined the guns at lunch time at a point in the Balin woods some two miles from the Abbey. Every one of the ladies had elected to walk, except two: the hostess, Lady Balin, and Lady Drusilla Lancaster, an elderly lady, a first cousin of Lord Balin. These two ladies were driven to the luncheon place in her Ladyship's pony phaeton.

'The fact is important; because that night the Abbey was broken into, and the room of every one of the ladies was entered by the burglar, or burglars, except Lady Drusilla's.'

'Lady Balin's room was not entered?'

'Yes, it was,' said my chief, 'and the famous Balin emeralds were abstracted. They are historical jewels, and cannot be worth less than £50,000.'

'Then the inference which you wish me to draw, that the four-mile walk and the day in the open air would have made all the ladies drowsy except the hostess and Lady Drusilla, partly breaks down.'

My chief smiled. 'Only partly. Lady Balin is a stout lady, and presumably a heavy sleeper. That fact would be known to the dwellers at the Abbey— servants and others.'

'Ah,' I said, 'you suspect connivance of some one in the house?'

'We are sure of it. The burglar had learnt when to break in, where to break in, and, being in, where to go. The house is ancient and very large, and the corridors and passages and bedrooms are a perfect rabbit warren; no one but an inmate could make his way about. He made no mistake. He went into every room where there were jewels to be got, and he took everything except the pearls and diamonds of Lady Drusilla. The old lady is more careless even than most ladies with her jewels, and insists upon her maid leaving the string of pearls— about the biggest in the country— hanging by the side of her mirror, and her diamond necklace and pendant fastened to her pincushion, where she can see both from her bed In the light of her night-light. Coggins, or his agent, never troubled her, however, and her diamonds and pearls were safe in the morning.'

The chief had turned over the pages of a little MS. pocket-book, and he referred to an entry in it as he read these particulars in the habits and behaviour of Lady Drusilla Lancaster.

'Lord Balin,' my chief went on, 'was here this morning. He asks, with the sanction of the local police, for the help of Scotland Yard. He wished to offer a great reward. I dissuaded him. He was himself of opinion that the burglar must have a confederate in the house. I told him I had no doubt of it. I told him I would send a couple of my men down to make inquiries. These inquiries, as you know. Sergeant, made openly and to the knowledge of every one, are worth next to nothing. I told Lord Balin so; but told him that, with his leave, I

would also send down a competent officer with two assistants, who, while the other officers would fill the eyes of the people at Balin, would carry on a real inquiry. Would Lord Balin agree to receive such an officer as a guest?'

Lord Balin hesitated. He said, 'Would the detective be enough used to the ways of the world not to be discovered at once by the rest of my guests?'

'The person I shall choose,' said my chief, 'will run no such risk.'

Lord Balin bowed. 'I have an idea,' he said. 'I have a distant cousin in Australia of whom I often talk. I have never seen him since he was a child. Let your officer impersonate him.'

'What is his age?'

'About thirty or thirty-five,' said Lord Balin.

'Rich or poor?' asked the chief.

'Fabulously rich. A squatter who has speculated successfully in gold mines in Western Australia.'

'The very thing. My officer shall go down in a motor, with a chauffeur, and an Irish valet, both trustworthy officers in the force. Pray, Lord Balin, may I ask if you have lunched?'

'Not yet. I propose to do so at my club.*

'Please do, and when you come back I will introduce you to your relative from Australia!'

'Before Lord Balin went off to lunch,' said my chief, 'I took down from his lips certain intimate particulars relative to every guest staying in the Abbey. Here are my memoranda. Put them in your pocket and study them at your leisure.'

My chief, having given me these details of his conversation with Lord Balin with his accustomed succinctness and lucidity, turned to me and said:

'You will guess, Sergeant Morgan, that the cousin from Australia, whose name is Stanley, is yourself. Macgregor is your chauffeur, and O'Brien your valet and servant, both in your division; they will, of course, take their orders directly from you. Go with O'Brien to the stores now and make yourself ready to go down to Somersetshire. You know what a smart man's outfit should be on a country visit. As you are a millionaire, you may safely outdo good taste. You will take my own 24 h.p. Napier. Macgregor is accustomed to drive it, and he will carry you down in less than five hours. Try to get there before ten, so as to see the guests and make a good impression before you turn in for the night. The rest I leave entirely to you. Go now and make your preparations and purchases, and in two hours' time come back here and make Lord Balin's acquaintance.'

When I returned Lord Balin was with my chief.

He received me very pleasantly. Lord Balin is known for a charm of manner not common among Englishmen of his class. In his case it is explainable by the fact that he was in diplomacy before he succeeded to the peerage. I think my chief had said more in my favour than he had told me, for Lord Balin smoothed over a difficult position cleverly and kindly. He seemed particularly struck by the humour of the situation, and acted the part of a long-separated relation to perfection.

'Well, Mr. Stanley, you have changed less than I expected. It is true you were a chubby infant of four when your father carried you off to the Antipodes; you've grown, my boy, but not out of remembrance. I could swear to those eyes of yours. You don't remember me, Mr. Stanley— Stanley, I mean, for I must drop the Mr. with Dick Stanley's son.

'Now tell me, my dear Stanley, one thing. Can you shoot? Have you taken after your poor father in that?'

'I used to shoot pretty straight,' I said, 'years ago. I hope I haven't forgotten how.'

'I'm very glad to hear it. We have a big shoot on to-morrow, and we want an extra gun. Moreton is half blind, Pulteney nervous, and there is only myself left to account for the pheasants, and you, if you will help me. You didn't bring your guns from Australia?' asked Lord Balin slily.

'No,' I said, 'I'm afraid I left them behind.'

'Never mind, we can find you all that at the Abbey. I thought, Sir Henry,' said Lord Balin, addressing my chief, 'that I would not put off this shoot. It is one planned on pretty much the same scale as the one we had on the 23d, the day of the robbery, and I thought it would help our friend'— he turned to me— that everything should take place to-morrow as it took place on the day the Abbey was broken into.'

'Excellent idea! Pray, Lord Balin, combine your plans with Sergeant— with Mr. Stanley.' He laughed, shook hands with Lord Balin, nodded to me, and went off. 'You have your last orders. Sergeant,' he said to me as he left the room.

Lord Balin and I talked over things in the chief's room, and the more we talked the more did Lord Balin smooth over the awkwardness of the situation in which I found myself about to plunge, into the midst of a kind of society in which I had practically taken no part for over six years, and in which I was to appear— with the best of motives, of course— under false pretences, and in a name which did not belong to me.

It was a pleasant drive down to Balin Abbey in Somersetshire: cold but pleasant. We three professionals talked naturally of nothing but the great jewel robbery. Certainly our chief could not have given me a better staff.

Macgregor is a young Scotsman of great intelligence and promise. He would take advantage of his superior position in the house as chauffeur to deal with the upper servants. Phelim O'Brien, a clever, good-looking, lively Irishman, who had himself served in the Irish Constabulary, had found the county work in that service too dull, enlisted into a line regiment, had been an officer's servant, but gave that up for harder work of a higher kind, and found his way at last to Scotland Yard. We trusted to him to find out what was going on among the valets and ladies' maids in the servants' hall. We naturally talked of 'Coggins,' the mysterious factor in the criminal world. Coggins, who went about evading us— the king of burglars, a master of disguise and make-up, admired and feared by every thief, bully, and hooligan in the streets— and though always suspected, never arrested. The very boys chaffed the policeman on his beat with *'Yah! Pinch Coggins— caunt yer? Garn!*'— and here was this impudent scoundrel settled down at Pangford, within a few miles of the scene of his last successful exploit— and not a single ounce of evidence against him!

3: The Circle at Balin Abbey

BALIN ABBEY, in Somersetshire, is a huge, stately building of Shakespeare's time, untouched by the hand of the restorer— a grey pile that stands up amid a wide flat area of grounds and gardens contemporary with itself, with stone paved courts and pathways and tall rectilineal yew hedges. As we drew up, the moonlight of a wind-still, winter night shone full upon its walls and the few ancient cedars that grew thereby, and displayed the armorial carvings on wall surfaces and gable ends.

The ground is a plain, far and near, and the park studded with oak trees of great size. No high road runs within a mile of the Abbey, and I asked myself how the burglar could approach the house for purposes even of inspection without arousing observation, but Macgregor reminded me that the Abbey was one of the famous show houses of England, containing many valuable works of the great foreign masters and also priceless family portraits by Reynolds, Romney, and Raeburn.

'Be jabers,' said Phelim O'Brien, 'I hope the knowledge of that same won't reach "Gentleman Coggins" at Pangford. If it does, the devil a picture will be left on the walls of Balin Abbey.'

I never was so cordially, even so exuberantly, welcomed. Lord Balin could not better have played the part of a host welcoming a long-parted relative. His guests, many of whom had known and heard of my supposed father, came forward as cordially as their host. It was fortunate for me that I had done

garrison duty in Australia, or I should have been puzzled by some of the questions I was expected to answer.

For a moment I was confounded at the responsibility of my new part and even ashamed of my imposture. I was like an actor thrust forward upon the stage to act some important part that he feels to be beyond his powers, and is astounded at his own undeserved success and the applause of his audience.

I could see that there was not a shadow of suspicion in any of the company that I was anybody but the person I was impersonating. Presently I began to reflect that to do any good to my superior and to Lord Balin and his despoiled guests I must do my utmost to second Lord Balin's endeavours to put me in the shoes of Dick Stanley's son. So I let myself go forward, and presently I was, as the saying is, in the very skin of my part, and I began to be almost persuaded that I was no other than young Robert Stanley, Australian squatter and millionaire. I had studied my chiefs note-book in coming down. Most of the guests seemed to me thoroughly commonplace and uninteresting people. Lord and Lady Moreton and their two plain, good-humoured daughters, Lord Pulteney, a young man with every appearance of health and strength, but, according to his own account, a nerve-shattered neurasthenic, who got one into comers to complain of his health and the last new theories on serums, microbes, and what not. Two persons in the company struck me as standing apart, both were women,

One was the elderly lady whom I have mentioned before, Lady Drusilla Lancaster; the other a remarkably smart and handsome woman who was introduced to me as Mrs. Townley. I should call her an unusually well-dressed woman from the milliner's point of view, for I have eye enough to know what women and milliners mean by well dressed. It generally leaves men who are worth anything cold, but this woman had evidently thought less of the fashion plates, in dressing herself,, than of her remarkable beauty of face, hair, eyes and figure, and dressed to enhance these attributes. Her gown and its garniture seemed to me to be simple in defiance of the present mode which is not simple.

"When I put this point of view, admiringly, to Lady Drusilla Lancaster, that wise lady placed her double eye-glass upon her austere and aquiline nose and contemplated Mrs. Townley's half-reclining form with a severe expression.

'Pretty creature,' she said, with more contempt than admiration in her tone. 'That soft cloudy mauve goes wonderfully with that bright complexion of hers and her golden brown hair. And that great diamond-clasped pearl dog-collar on her neck and the pearl embroidery on her dress and the dog-collar bracelets of diamond and pearls suit her white skin perfectly. But I think you said, simple?'

'The effect is simple.'

'My dear man!'— it was a favourite old-fashioned form of speech with Lady Drusilla— 'my dear man, if simple means easy and if simple means cheap, that confection is nothing of the sort. Trust a woman's eyes! Paquin or Raudnitz has had sleepless nights over that dress, and you may be sure those *nuits blanches* will be represented in Paquin's or Raudnitz's bills!'

'Mrs. Townley is rich, I believe?'

'She is a widow, or rather a grass widow, without children, whose husband came into, or made, a great fortune the other day— so I hear. Her wealth is one of her many charms.'

'I never thought wealth was a charm.'

'It never was one in my best time. It is now. Hideous people with horrid manners come among us, and if they are rich, we overlook their looks, and their ways, and adore them. Then, just imagine what we do with rich people with sweet faces and figures, who know how to dress and talk, like Mrs. Townley?'

'You say her charm. Is her husband, then, a person of no importance?'

'On the contrary, a man of great importance and intelligence; for does he not manufacture the money that pays for all that luxury?'

'A dull, money-grubbing sort of man, I suppose?'

'My cousin Balin says not— says he is charming. His only fault is that he is never, so to say, anywhere. He is always travelling— always in pursuit of fortune, and always overtaking it. He even travelled here one day to see his wife and make Lord Balin's acquaintance. Balin says he is a delightful man and clever and learned beyond words. He was interested in everjrthing— the architecture, the abbey ruins, and, above all, the pictures. It seems he found out all sorts of masterpieces in the gallery that no one had ever suspected. The next morning before breakfast he had disappeared, had rushed down to Southampton to catch the next steamer for Tokio or the River Plate, I forget which.'

'I am glad you approve of Mrs. Townley,' I said, 'She is certainly charming.'

'She is; but pray do not go and fall in love with her, Mr. Stanley. Believe me, she is horrid in some ways, and I owe it to the son of my old friend Dick Stanley to tell him so.'

'Horrid?'

'Horrid! A baddish, indiscriminate flirt, a heartless woman, and a very selfish one, insincere and— all the rest of it. Mind, I don't say not virtuous. I am sure she is as good as gold. It makes it all the worse, for it deprives her of the excuse of temptation.'

I was so taken aback by this outspokenness that I said nothing for a minute. 'Now,' said the lady, 'that I have given myself away, and made you think me a spiteful old cat, I'll tell you why I said it all.'

I smiled. 'You spoke out, and I am rather afraid your voice reached to Mrs. Townley's ears.'

'My dear man! I talked loud just that I might not be heard. That woman has the ears of a lynx. If I had dropped my voice she would have overheard every word I said. She is not like one of us, who never condescend to listen when people abuse us. But no, I change my mind, I won't say why I abuse her. Let's leave her alone. You see I hate her! Tell me about yourself and your father. I knew him well and liked him immensely. Shall I confess the truth? I admired him— we most of us did. You have just his eyes, Mr. Stanley, and you would be like him but for that horrid beard of yours. Forgive me for saying that ! He was in the Guards when I knew him first. Then he got into debt— all the nice ones do— and exchanged into a crack cavalry regiment— which? the Scots Greys, I think— ruined himself entirely, and we had to let him go to the land of kangaroos and gold. Dear Mr. Stanley, if you wore your moustache only, you would be the image of him. You have just his height, his square shoulders and his light figure.'

'I may remark here that I had let my beard grow when I had left the army, short and trimmed back, to be sure— but it was a most complete disguise. I passed my oldest friends in the street and they never knew me. There is no such disguise as a beard.

Lord Balin followed the hospitable custom of showing his latest guest his bedroom. I noticed that the guests left the drawing-room in a body, and we found ourselves in the great hall from which broad flights of polished oaken stairs lead in three directions to the bedrooms on the floor above. On the hall table were two great silver trays, on one of which had been ranged decanters of white wines and spirits, with mineral waters. On the other were great crystal decanters of what looked like barley water. Most of the men and all the women drank copiously of this soothing and harmless beverage. All except Lady Drusilla. I filled a glass and brought it to her. She took it and touched the rim with her lips, barely tasting the liquid.

'It is bad luck, isn't it?' she said, smiling (there are few things more taking than the rare smile of an austere old woman), 'to refuse the first thing one is offered by a new friend, and I want nothing bad to come between us two.'

'Thank you,' I said. 'You don't like barley water?'

'Well,' she said, 'if I drank as much dry champagne and sweet Benedictine as some of the women, perhaps I should be thirsty too. Besides which,' said

Lady Drusilla with a curious bluntness, 'I don't like my drink meddled with by other people.'

'How meddled with?'

'Well, the other night I came out just before the others. I was sleepy, and I saw a woman stirring up the barley water with a long spoon. "What are you doing?" I asked, staring at her. "Only putting in a little more sugar. It is never quite sweet enough for me," she said.

'I wonder who it was?' I remarked. 'The housekeeper, perhaps.'

Lady Drusilla did not appear to hear my question.

'Good-night,' she said, 'and don't dream of burglars.'

'I shall lock my door,' I said, laughing.

'I shall not lock mine,' she said, 'for all the burglars in England, besides—'

I laughed. 'You are not afraid of seeing a masked figure with a dark lantern in one hand and a revolver in the other—'

'Not at all,' she said, laughing in her turn. 'That is not the sort of figure I should see. I don't think I should see a man at all. Oh ! I shouldn't be afraid.'

We both laughed. I don't quite know why.

Mrs. Townley had interrupted her talk with young Lord Pulteney and was watching us. Was she, like the man in the old play, sure we were talking of her because we laughed so heartily?

I followed Lord Balin after the others had all said their last good-nights and had gone to the bedrooms. He showed me into mine. No sooner had he shut the door behind him than he sat down and laughed heartily.

'Now, did I do it well?' he asked. 'I used to be rather good at private theatricals, but, by Jove, I don't think I ever played so well as to-night. And you? Do you know the whole lot of them have been congratulating me on my new-found kinsman. Lady Drusilla raves about you, and the beautiful Mrs. Townley is sulking with her for monopolising you all the evening. I say, though, my boy, there's one thing I'm sorry for — danmed sorry for P

'What is that, Lord Balin?'

'Why, that it isn't true— that you are not Bob Stanley and come to settle in the Old Country.'

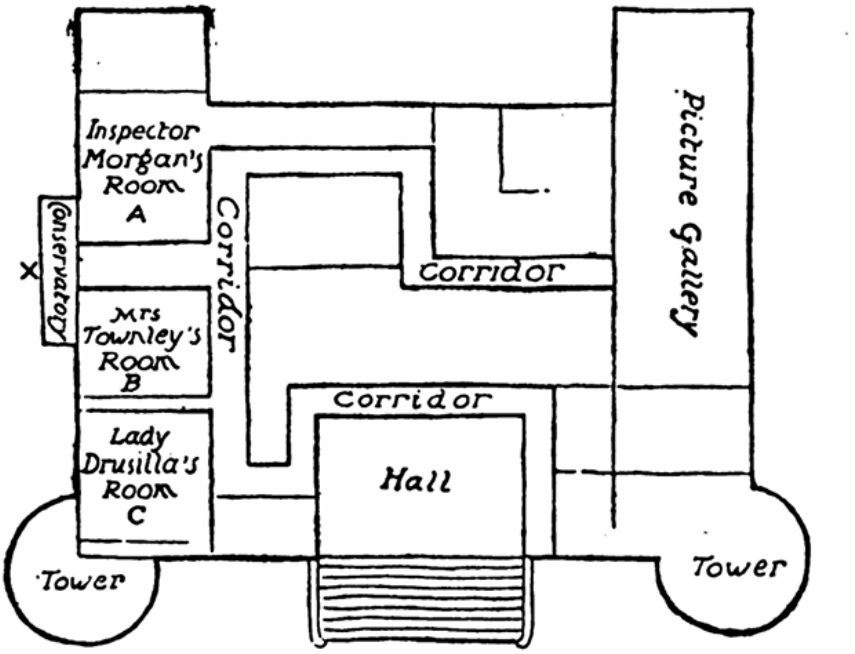
'I had come to discharge a rather difficult and disagreeable duty, and, behold, I found myself in a Capua!'

'It's my great wealth that does it, I suppose. Lady Drusilla tells me wealth is the modern open sesame into society and into men's and women's hearts.'

'Not into mine, Stanley— and, by Jove, if you knew her, not into my cousin Drusilla's either.'

I thought it about time to get Lord Balin to give me some particulars. He was prepared. He had brought a plan of the first floor of the house. It was something like this.

Morgan took out his note-book, and on a blank sheet of it drew a rough sketch something like this which I give here .



'The cross marks the place where the burglar had forced an entry, by entering the conservatory, climbing up a ladder inside, pushing up a skylight, and entering the corridor which leads to all the bedrooms of the guests. Observe that the bedroom marked A is mine, opposite to me is the bedroom B, occupied on the night of the robbery by Mrs. Townley. While her bedroom was entered and valuable jewels taken. Lady Drusilla's, marked C, was left unentered, although the burglar must have passed her door on his way to the other wing of the house, where every room occupied by a lady was entered and the jewels abstracted. The passing by of Lady Drusilla's door, though it was known to every one what a prize lay there unguarded for the taking, was unaccountable, and perhaps should furnish some clue to the thief and the motives of the thief.

I asked Lord Balin if the forcing of the window leading from the end of the corridor on the flat roof of the conservatory might not be a sham entry, while all the time the real thief was some one, perhaps a servant, in the house.

Lord Balin had considered that, but he did not think it possible. In the first place, the entry had been effected, according to the testimony of the two officers from Scotland Yard, with such skill that it could be the work of no one

but a skilled professional. They would no doubt report all the circumstances to me, when I should deem it prudent to see them. I told Lord Balin that the officer Macgregor had been instructed by me to act as intermediary between myself and the two detectives, so as not to arouse suspicion by my speaking to them myself.

'Then,' said Lord Balin, 'I can't do better than let you ring for your valet and chauffeur, interview them and leave you together. If you want to see me in private, you will always find me alone in the library.

Macgregor and O'Brien came and brought with them the report of the two detectives on the spot. They exactly confirmed what Lord Balin had told me. The window of the corridor was strongly barred with iron, and a bar had been removed from its soldered inlet in the stonework of the window. A circular hole had been cut through the thick plate-glass window, exactly over the bolt in the heavy oaken shutter, the shutter likewise had been neatly perforated with a burglar's centre-bit, the bolt pushed back, and window and shutter opened. No one but a very clever professional burglar could do such work so neatly, and even so it was a job that would take some time to execute. There was the mark of a hand on the glass and on the shutter, but the hand had been gloved. No betraying finger-marks had been left. There were plentiful footprints on the turf near where the entrance had been effected, the night having been rainy and the wind high. There were even muddy marks where a man had trodden in the corridor, but, after four or five steps, the muddy impressions got fainter, as they naturally would, and presently disappeared altogether. The prints were untraceable for this reason, that rough socks had been drawn over the wearer's boots. So much for the burglar's entry. The wonder was that any one could break into Balin Abbey, for a night fireman was on duty all night in the hall. It is true he was a very old man, and that he remained on the ground floor and only patrolled the hall and the rooms on that floor, but the hall runs up nearly to the roof of the house, and any movement in the corridors would presumably be visible or audible from below. It seemed, moreover, impossible to come near the house without being observed, for, at nightfall, two under-keepers patrol the grounds, with two fierce bloodhounds in leash. After this patrolling, the dogs, which are kept shut up in the dark all day, are let loose, and only taken in again and fed at daylight. This practice, a precaution against poachers and tramps, had been followed for years, and was known all over the neighbourhood. Under these difficult circumstances a burglarious entry of the premises had always seemed to the owners and inmates of Balin Abbey an impossible circumstance.

I had suggested to Lord Balin almost at once upon my introduction to him that the robbery might have been done by a servant, male or female, either in

the service of a guest or of the family. Lord Balin had told me that this was in the last degree improbable, from the fact of a curious domestic usage in existence at the Abbey from the days when the building had been a conventual house. All the men servants sleep in the east wing of the third story, and the women in the west wing— neither inmates of the separate sleeping apartments being able to reach the lower part of the house without, in the case of the men, their passing through a door of which the key is kept by the house steward; in the case of the women, without their passing through the bedroom of the house-keeper.

This circumstance by itself, therefore, almost precludes the possibility of collusion between an outside burglar and a servant.

It left this, then, as the inevitable conclusion. The crime which, from its nature and all the circumstances of difficulty surrounding it, could not have been committed by any single unaided burglar, must have been the joint action of a skilful professional criminal, acting in confederacy either with an inmate of the house, not a servant, or else with the connivance and help of one of the gamekeepers, of whom there was a small army at Balin Abbey. I put this latter possibility aside almost as soon as it occurred to me, for it is well known to members of our profession that criminality, of anything more than a petty larceny character, is nearly unknown among the gamekeeper class in this country. Taking them as a whole, a more respectable and honest community of men does not exist. Apart from which, the keepers have no access to the dwelling part of the house, and it was proved that the burglar's confederate had a very complete and intimate knowledge not only of where the possessors of the jewels slept, but of exactly where, in what drawers, cabinets or receptacles, the jewels were kept by their owners.

I went to sleep that night with the problem summed up in its shortest terms: A great and successful jewel robbery, clear traces of burglarious entry by a most skilful operator, the fact that the most notorious burglar in Great Britain had taken up his residence in a town in the neighbourhood, the still more unaccountable circumstance that he still remained there after the jewels were stolen. What could be the only deduction from these facts but that, though the robbery had been successful, the jewels had not yet been carried off by the principal in the affair. They must therefore still be in the Abbey. Since the robbery, I had been told that two additional blood-hounds had been let loose every night. The ways of these animals are well known, they are the fiercest among the race of dogs, their natural prey is man, and they never give tongue but when they scent their quarry.

Unlike almost every other description of dog, they never bark or bay without cause. Therefore, if a single hound gives tongue in the night, it would

be a signal to the other hounds that their quarry was afoot, the night would be filled by their baying, and the whole house instantly on the alert. With four such animals at large it was certain that no stranger would dare to approach the windows of Balin Abbey. This, then, was probably the explanation of the mystery of the continued stay at Pangford of the burglar Coggins, if indeed he was the author of the crime. He was waiting to receive the proceeds of the robbery from his confederate, an inmate of the Abbey. Why could not the jewels be made up into a parcel and sent away by post? The answer is that such a proceeding, since the advent of the police officers in the house, would be an extremely risky operation. Every postal packet would be scrutinised.

So far my conclusions had now led me. I had ordered Macgregor to be ready for me with the motor by day- light/ O'Brien was to be on the watch round the house so soon as the hounds were called in, which was always done as soon as the eye could travel a hundred yards across the lawns.

The next day was to bring with it several renarkable Surprises and discoveries.

4: The First Discovery

I WAS up and was dressing before dawn, and from I my window watched the great walls of yew turn from black to green, and their shadows, across the frost-covered lawns, slowly shorten, as the sun's globe rose from the eastern woods. I heard the keepers whistle, and saw the four fawn-coated hounds gallop slowly and lurchingly towards the sound. As they went they left their footprints on the white rime which lay on turf, paths, and flower beds. It was going to be a glorious day, and presently the sun, in a cloudless sky, would draw up the slight hoar frost. I went down and weiit out. I could hear the snorting of the motor in the stable-yard where I had told Macgregor to wait for me, but I would go round, first, by the conservatory under Mrs. Townley's and my windows, and take a survey of the ground. I could see for myself how, through the flat roof of the conservatory, half glass, half lead, the burglar had made his way, and how, from the roof, he had climbed by the thick stem of a wistaria to the window of the corridor — a bold and difficult feat, and one that only a master of his craft could attempt. How had a man, doing all this at night, escaped the bloodhounds which were at large every night? It puzzled me. And the explanation only came later.

I walked along a broad stone-paved path that leads from the conservatory, and looked back at the house. Every blind was down and every shutter closed. The path leads to the lawn tennis ground. I reached a grassy plot of turf beyond where the few ruins of the ancient Abbey are visible, ruined bits of

walls and archways rising sheer from level well-shorn turf. The ground all round was at present one level sheet of hoar frost, dazzlingly white in the red rays of the rising sun.

My eye was caught suddenly by a curious break in the whiteness, a little circular patch of green, no larger across than the palm of a man's hand, close to a ruined archway that rose out of the ground and broke the level monotony of white. Clearly a piece of wood, probably the top of some half -rotted post, just under the surface, had raised the temperature and prevented the deposition of frost crystals in that particular spot.

Though quite satisfied with my explanation, the fancy took me to examine into the thing more closely. I went down on my knees, and perceived at once that the circle was artificially made, probably by a gardener's trowel. I perceived that the tool had cut deep all round the little circle. I took hold of the grass and pulled at it, but the slight frost had frozen all together. I took a pen-knife from my pocket and passed the longest blade deep round the circle and pulled again at the blades of grass. The bit of turf lifted as the top of a box lifts up and revealed the hole in the ground, entirely filled by a brown paper parcel a little larger than a man's fist.

The jewels? No! Only their gold settings.

I put the parcel half opened in my pocket, filled in the hole with a clod of earth, replaced the turfy covering, stamped all down smooth, and knew that, in half an hour, when the sun should have melted the hoar frost, not a trace would be left of my morning's work.

Who had done this? Who had detached the gems from their setting and deposited them in this hiding-place? And why had it been done? To answer the last question first: The settings were clearly removed to lessen the chance of detection, and to make the jewels more easy to pass or send away. Who had taken the stones from the setting? Clearly not the burglar. It was a two hours' job for an expert, working with pliers and pincers. He would not have had the time. Clearly it was the work of his confederate, the inmate of the house, and he, or she, had hidden the gold settings in a place where they might reasonably be expected to lie, lost to man's cognizance, forever. The place of concealment was admirably chosen— it was a secluded, unfrequented part of the grounds, where the Abbey ruins lay— and a person engaged in making the cache in such a spot could safely count on not being observed by guests or gardeners.

I communicated my discovery to Macgregor as we motored to Pangf ord, where I desired to see the chief of our agents who were there to watch the suspected Coggins.

'It's growing warm, sir,' said Macgregor, when I showed him the jewel settings. 'It's growing warm.'

I thought so too, yet we were as far as ever from bringing the thing home to the man we were morally sure was the real author of the crime— Gentleman Coggins.

5: Sergeant Smith: His Opions and Adventures

SERGEANT SMITH is in charge of the party ^^deputed to watch the redoubtable Coggins at Pangf ord. The Sergeant is a North country man, senior to me in the force, but of more recent promotion, a very hard-working, conscientious man, but, to tell truth, I felt that Smith was not quite a match for the wily Coggins. I did not let Macgregor take the motor into the town, but waited outside the houses while Macgregor went on foot and brought Sergeant Smith to report and confer with me.

Sergeant Smith had a strange tale to relate. It appears to him that Coggins has his heart in his new business. The Sergeant prudently keeps out of Coggins' way himself for fear of recognition, but neither of his men have ever seen him or been seen by him, and they drop from time to time into the bar parlour of the Balin Arms. From that 'coign of vantage' they can hear Coggins in the commercial room, talking loud in broken English, laughing, singing snatches of French songs, vociferating in his foreign way, joking with his fellow-travellers, boasting of his commercial successes, and then again talking over his many customers. For he has introduced some wonderful ^cheap lines,' as commercial people call them, in silk ties, smart handkerchiefs, all sold at remarkably low prices. He is out day after day, and at all times of the day, with the inn dog-cart and the ostler's boy. He visits all the neighbouring village shops, and talk of him has gone round the country. 'I suppose,' said Sergeant Smith, 'he will get a dozen calls in a day from the small shopkeeepers in the towns and villages round about to get more of his cheap stuff.'

'And no one, I suppose, has any suspicion about him?' I asked.

'No danger! They just think him a smart business man opening up a new line, and willing to let his stuff go cheap at first. Naturally, they want to make hay while the sun shines— and sometimes, Sergeant Morgan, I ask myself if this Mr. Dubois, as he calls himself....' Sergeant Smith pondered.

'You ask yourself,' I suggested, 'if Mr. Dubois is really Grentleman Coggins after all.'

'Just so,' said Smith, laughing. 'We are beginning here to ask ourselves that.'

'I cannot help you, Sergeant Smith, I've never seen Coggins— but you have.'

'That's just it,' said Smith. 'I've taken many a squint at this fellow Dubois through windows and the like, and for the life of me I can't spot him. The real Coggins is a sallow, clean-shaven fellow, just like one of those actor chaps you can see any day by the dozen in the Strand, and the real Coggins pulls a long face. Now this man is a rosy-gilled fellow— that's smiling and laughing all the time, no moustache, but a stiff black beard, shaved a bit on the cheeks, and going under his chin like a Newcastle ruff— French fashion.'

'I don't think the office have made any mistake. Stick to him, Sergeant. It's Coggins, you bet—'

'I will stick to him, and I have stuck to him, Coggins or not Coggins,' said Sergeant Smith, 'and I'll give you an example of how I've done it. Yesterday he ordered the inn dog-cart and drove out. It was close upon three o'clock in the afternoon. I thought I would follow him on my bicycle, as I had often done before in the last three weeks that we have been watching him. I had not noticed that he had taken his own bicycle with him in the cart, covered with a rug. He drove to a village beyond Balin, got out and did business at the general shop. I held back out of sight, and when I came up to the trap again the ostler's lad was driving alone.

' "Why," said I to the boy, "where's Mr. Dubois?"

' "He had his bicycle with him," said the lad, "and he goes to Pincote village and gets me to leave samples at places on the way back to Pangford."

' "Grone to Pincote, is he?"

'So I pedalled on fast, and presently got him in sight again, and he led me a pretty chase long past Pincote, up and down very bad roads, and I thought I'd just go up to him for once, and ask him what the devil he was up to. Just at this moment Dubois dashed into a narrow lane and I followed him. I felt I had the speed of him, and was overhauling him fast, when— whuff!— I ran over something and punctured my tyre badly, very badly, and presently I had to pull up. I got down, it was a clean cut, and in another part of the tyre were two tin tacks stuck fast. Had Coggins, or Dubois, whichever it is, sprinkled the road with glass and tacks, or was it the work of some cantankerous fellow who lived near the lane? I saw my man pedalling steadily ahead, and presently he was out of sight. My bicycle was useless, and I stood over it, thinking what I should do next. As I stood there cursing my luck I heard a rustic come singing and whistling down the lane from the direction towards which I had been travelling.

'He was a simple-looking young fellow in a tucked-up smock frock and leather gaiters, with a little battered wide-awake hat on the back of his head. He carried a bill-hook on his shoulder, and tied to the bill by a bit of string was a pair of thick, rough hedger's gauntlets.

'He stopped whistling *The Girl I Left Behind Me*, as he saw me— stood and stared with his mouth open for a good minute, then began to grin from ear to ear like an idiot.

' "Practising to grin through a horse collar, are you, my lad?" I said. "Did you never see a punctured tyre before?"

' "Forgie I,' said the fellow, in a strong Somersetshire brogue. "Forgie I, zur, fer a-venturing to laugh, but I niver zee two punctured uns in Farmer Joyce's lane, a one day, af oor!" and he laughed out loud.

' "What?" I said. "Is the other fellow caught too?"

' "Ay, zur, at t'other end of the lane, and a swearing so terrible bad I had to move away from he. Ha! ha! It do tickle I!"

'Then he looked suddenly serious. "Yer moightend want a bit o' hedging and ditching done, zur? I foinds my own gloves and my own bill 'uk."

He leant his bill-hook on the ground and dangled his great leathern gloves at me. "I'm reckoned a foine worker!" he added.

' "Tell me where's the nearest blacksmith's forge," I said, "and I'll give you sixpence.'

' "Will ee now, zur?" he said with a greedy look in his eyes, and he came near and held his hand out. "T'other gentleman gave I a shilling for tellin' he, but I'll take sixpence from you, zur."

'I put a shilling in his open hand and he began to direct me. "You be to go up droo the lane and keep a-trendin' and a-turnin' to your left and then to your right, and then to your left and right again, droo the moorland till you come plump on to a horse pond that's just over against Jim Bevan's forge, only you can't see the forge rightly till you'm turned the next carner. Do 'ee understand I, zur? And thankin'yer for your shillin', I'll be goin' whoam, zur."

The young rustic was whistling again and presently he broke into his song again of *The Girl I Left Behind Me*. I suppose it was a sort of rustic chaff an his part.

'I dragged my bicycle up through the lane and out upon the common, but I never saw a trace of the man I was after, nor did I find Jem Bevan's forge.'

' "But I suspect, Sergeant Smith, that you had found Gentleman Coggins himself.'

' "What, the grinning idiot with the bill-hook! Never! Remember, I know Coggins by sight. This fellow was just a silly Somersetshire lad with an accent you could cut with a knife.'

I said no more, but I had my doubts. 'Tell me one thing, Sergeant Smith. Is the man Dubois often away in the night-time? Did you miss him, for instance, on the night of the 23rd when the burglary at the Abbey was done?'

'No, Sergeant Morgan, we did not.' The detective took out his nate-book, and, turning back to the date in question, read out the following:-

January 23rd.-Dubois, supposed Coggins, went out on bicycle in early morning and never returned till dark. Saw several visitors before leaving, said to be from neighbouring villages some of them took samples away with them.He received these customers mostly in little private office off his bedroom-my man had looked into the office in his absence one day, found it spread with samples, mostly cheap silks and neckties. Same day, brisk. business. Inn servants and people in commercial room complain of Dubois's noisiness. At 9.30 in the evening, a man, said to be from Pincote, came to see him. Dubois angry, lent him away. Reproved him loudly for coming to see him late and just as he was going to bed. Allowed man to take parcel of samples, but refused to do other business with him, told him he must come again at nine next morning. Dubois called out in the bearing of inn servants that he was going to turn in. Man left muttering. Dubois was overhead in his bedroom for some time. Officer remained on watch in neighbourhood of inn. Dubois did not go out. Nothing further happened.

'Thank you, Sergeant Smith. Tell your men tp keep their eyes skinned. They have to deal with a sharp fellow in Coggins— very clever in disguises. Let them be sure he doesn't go out disguised and leave one of his fellows to stamp about on the floor overhead, making them think Coggins is home.'

Sergeant Smith did not relish my advice.

'I thank you, Sergeant,' he said stiffly, 'for your counsel. I will do my duty to the best of my ability.'

6: The New Beater

WE drove back to the Abbey, and I was in good time to sit down with the party at breakfast and hear all the preparations for the coming shoot.

After breakfast Lord Balin took me into the gun-room and let me choose a couple of guns. As my host is of about my own height and arm-length, I found no difficulty in finding two that he had discarded with advancing age, a rather heavy Lancaster and a lighter Westley Richards.

We drove to the woods about a mile away where the shooting was to begin. Great traditions of sport are followed at Balin— a company of keepers marshals and directs an army of beaters, and the procession of shooters, beaters and guns through the great beech wood is most interesting. Pheasants and ground game abound, but the shooting is varied. An occasional roe-deer starts before the beaters in the copses. Now and again, a glade in the woods opens and discloses a mere surrounded with willows, rushes and sedges, where mallard, teal, widgeon and snipe rise before the guns.

The day was clear and the air ringing. It is the good old fashion at Balin Abbey not to repress the homely humour of the rustic beaters. They seemed to enjoy the sport quite as much as the gentlemen, and one heard jests and laughter and mutual chaff among than. Now and again, when the covert was more than usually thick, I heard singing along the line. Some one with a clear, resonant voice had started the well-known Somersetshire song, '*Cham a Zummerzetshire man*,' and keepers and beaters and even 'the guns' themselves joined in the chorus to this air, known to every soul in Somerset.

'Who is it with that good voice?' I asked of one of my loaders.

'It is a queer half-cracked fellow that one of the keepers picked up on the road, looking for a job of hedging and ditching. He doesn't shirk his work in the woods, doesn't Joe, and he keeps the line in heart with his songs and catches.'

I remembered the misadventures of poor Sergeant Smith. 'What,' I thought, 'has Coggins the impudence to venture into the lion's den?'

'Is the fellow,' I asked, 'a Somersetshire man?'

'By his talk,' said the loader, 'I should say he comes more Devonshire way, but he knows all our West Country ditties. Hark to him now, sir!'

The singer began the first verse of that queer old Somersetshire ballad

A shepherd kept sheep on a hill so high,
And there came a fair lady riding by.

The long line of beaters and keepers burst out with the odd uncouth words that form the chorus of the old ballad, and beat the measure out vigorously with their sticks against the tree trunks— then the ballad went on with the singer's ready memory, and the verses were broken into now and again with the rustle of a pheasant's wings through the tree branches, the cries of a keeper, 'Hare back,' or 'Cock forward,' or the banging of the guns. At the end of the song the gentleman cried 'Bravo!'

'Where have I heard that voice?' I asked myself, 'that fine, rolling baritone?'

We stopped to lunch at an enchanting spot in the great beech woods. The ladies had already arrived and were sitting or standing under the trees where the great bulging roots of the beech trees, covered with moss, emerald green, formed convenient seats. On the dry bare earth, still spangled with the fallen leaves, russet gold, the servants from the Abbey were laying the cloth for luncheon and handing out dishes from the hampers they had brought.

The keepers and beaters sat down round a good midday meal, fifty yards away from us. Much laughter, chaff and talk was going on among them. We men went forward to look at the game, laid out in rows on a grassy bank. Lord Balin congratulated me heartily on my shooting. He and I between us had accounted for more than three-fourths of the whole bag.

We lunched, and the meal was gay.

'Did you have that delightful Joe again among the beaters?' asked Lady Drusilla— 'the rustic with the lovely voice?'

The men told her of his singing of the Somersetshire ballad and how they had enjoyed it.

'When one thinks,' said Lady Drusilla, 'that a man with a voice and memory like that could earn a fortune at those hateful London music-halls!— and lose his country complexion, his country figure, and his country health in a season! How lucky It is no one tells him!'

The point was debated. Mrs. Townley said he ought to be told the truth and have his choice offered. She said. 'Surely ignorance is never bliss in this world, and poverty, I am quite sure, was never a blessing to any one.'

The discussion went on and only ended by our begging our host to let the man come and sing to the ladies.

He came. It was just the man Sergeant Smith had told me of in the lane, the same leather gaiters, the same tucked-up smock frock, the same little battered wide-awake hat set back on his head, that gave him, with his upraised eyebrows and perpetual smile, an air of rustic simplicity and innocence. Could this possibly be the redoubtable Coggins? I had reproved Sergeant Smith for not suspecting him in this very guise, and now I could hardly bring myself to consider him anything but what he seemed to be, a simple West Country lout who was accepted for such in a company of his own West Countrymen.

He stood leaning on his beating stick, with his hat in his hand, seeming half shy, half proud that he had attracted the attention of the quality.

He began to sing the old ballad. At first his voice was a little shaky as if with a natural diffidence before the strange company. Then he gained confidence and sang, and his voice rang out clear and ringing. At the end of every verse came the queer chorus, joined in by the rustics' voices from the distance, and presently the ladies and gmtlemen caught up the air too, and the woods re-echoed with a melody perhaps as old as themselves. Something quaint and old world, something of rustic wit, rustic humour, and rustic romance that our modern hurry has quite let slip from our lives was in the old song. Lord Balin's guests were delighted. They cheered the singer heartily and asked for another song.

I watched every look and turn of the man's face, every inflection of his voice. Where, when, and in what different circumstances had it all been present to me?— not the song indeed, that was new to me, but the ring of the singer's voice, and all his inflections, all his tricks of manner. Memory sometimes shuts the gates of consciousness very close, but a whisper comes at times through the locked portals.

Mrs. Townley rose and approached the singer— she said a word or two of praise to him. He took off his hat, bowed with a bashful, rustic grace, and held it out towards her, asking unmistakably for a tip. The men laughed at the broad hint and felt for their purses, and Mrs. Townley searched in the knotted comer of her lace handkerchief— a lady's purse— for a coin.

I stepped quickly forward between Mrs. Townley and the singer and looked hard at her hands. The man, seeing himself watched, stepped quickly back. Mrs. Townley laughed nervously. 'You must sing us another song, Mr. Joe,' she said, 'and then I'll make a collection for you.'

I said to myself, 'You will drop nothing into Joe's hat with my leave, madam,' and I kept a sharper watch than ever upon the two. I knew not much as yet, but something told me that I was in the presence of the two chief actors of the drama at Balin Abbey. Why was Coggins here? for that the singer was Coggins I had no doubt at all now. Had I had any before, Mrs. Townley's action and manner would have sufficed to banish these doubts.

To what criminal end was Coggins still here? For no possible reason, I was sure, except that his confederate had had no opportunity as yet of passing into his hands the stolen gems whose setting she had hidden among the Abbey ruins.

How was it I had come to fix the guilt of confederacy so confidently on Mrs. Townley? The actual evidence was almost nil. I answer that I arrived partly intuitively at this conclusion, partly by the elimination of every other possible personage in the house. That there was a confederate was certain. The cleverest burglar could not have acted alone. Who, then, was it? I saw at once that only two persons were intellectually capable of the difficult role played by the confederate— Lady Drusilla and Mrs. Townley. Lady Drusilla's character, her age, her antecedents and a certain air of uprightness about her, put her beyond all possibility of suspicion. There was nothing of all this in Mrs. Townley. I had been at once impressed by a tone of insincerity in her voice, a false gaiety in her manner, a feigned seriousness, and a constant pretence of sham enthusiasm and sham earnestness. She was never quite at home among the people of more assured social position than herself at the Abbey. She had not their ease and naturalness. All this had set me against her in spite of her great beauty and her obvious desire to please and attract. I must confess too that Lady Drusilla's strong disparagement almost at starting had been for something in my distrust. With pretty women it is often the first stroke that wins the game, or loses it for them. If they make that first happy stroke to their advantage, their charm and beauty tell on us and they score ; if it is we who get in the first winning point, it is they who lose. Mrs. Townley never made the first winning stroke ; I was in opposition to her from the first.

When I saw her rise to go towards the man I knew now to be the disguised burglar— when I saw her fumble with her knotted handkerchief, I knew that in another minute the jewels would have passed from her to him. I had stopped her, and the moment afterwards I almost regretted that I had done so. What if I had let her pass the stolen gems and then immediately arrested the culprit with the property on him? What a coup ! What a bold and dramatic situation! Yes! and what an extremely unpleasant one to every guest present, and what if a single link in my long line of suppositions and intuitions and conclusions had broken? What if the new beater was, after all, a harmless rustic, the jewels not in his possession at all? What if Mrs. Townley was an innocent lady? My blood ran cold at the thought of such a catastrophe of misadventures happening in this delightful woodland scene.

Mrs. Townley returned to her seat under the beech tree. I stood watching them both in seeming eager talk with the other guests.

'Won't he sing us another song?' asked Lady Drusilla.

Lord Balin asked him. The fellow took off his hat and grinned from ear to ear.

'Do, Mr. Joe,' said Mrs. Townley, 'some good old country ditty, and after that we will make a collection for you.'

Joe played at being the diffident, over-honoured minstrel. At last he set his hat again upon the back of his head, and slanting his long stick upon his shoulder, he began the first bars of an air that is known to every English soldier. It is called 'Turmut Hoeing,' and is the regimented march of the Wiltshire that was once the 56th Regiment. The words are simple, rustic and homely, like the air. Here they are, for I know them by heart:

Some love to plough and some to sow.
And some delight in mowing.
Some, 'mid the hay, will stand all day,
And loves to be a throwing
The new mown hay wi' pitchfork up—
Gie I the turmut hoeing!
Gie I my hoe and let me go
To do the turmut hoeing.
Oh! the hoe! 'tis the hoe, the hoe I loves to handle!
And 'tis just so! ay! 'tis just so, that the hoe I loves to handle.

The disguised burglar suited his action to the words, using his beater's staff as a hoe.

"For 'tis the pay, five bob a day,
The farmer is a owing!

Five bob a day will jolly well pay
To set the ale-pot flowing!
So that's the reason that in the season,
When turmut flies be blowing,
I takes my hoe and off I go
To do the turmut hoeing !
Oh! The hoe, &c.

Some loves to sing of early spring
And days of barley sowing.
Some love to rhyme of sweet May time
When daffodils be blowing.
Gie I the moon that shines in June
When turmut fields want hoeing.
Ah ! he's no fool who loves the tool
That does the turmut hoeing!
Oh! The hoe, &c.

The pretended rustic had not sung the first line before the scales seemed to fall from my eyes— air, voice, and manner all came back to me in a moment, and, now that I could remember so much, the face itself began to reveal itself through all its disguises. I had heard the song sung a score of times at our mess by Captain Towers, Towers the turf swindler, Towers the card-sharper, Towers the author of my ruin. Towers the cause of my kinsman's death. Towers whose own death I had read in the papers and believed in, three years before. Towers himself was before me ! Here was a revelation indeed. In a flash and by a sort of accident I had learnt more than the whole police force of London knew. If this indeed were Coggins, then Coggins the burglar and Towers the swindler were one and the same man, and my triumph was that here stood I face to face with him and he knew me not! I knew his secret and he never suspected mine. In truth he had not heard my voice, except in those tones that a man does not often use in the society of men, either his equals or inferiors. I had spoken but a word to Mrs. Townley in his hearing. My face he would not know, it was sufficiently disguised by my beard.

"I listened to his song, as he sang with excellent comic effect and in the broadest of Wiltshire accents. The song is well known in the West, and I want you to read into it all the character and cleverness which the disguised criminal was employing, in the presence of his former victim. There is a humour in naked facts even greater sometimes than the humour in words, tone and manner, and that form of humour I was enjoying to the utmost and all to myself, while the scoundrel was priding himself upon taking us all in.

The ladies liked the turn the song took in the third stanza. They thought it poetical. I thought the whole thing, song included, was more than poetical. It

was an ethical drama charged with human interest, working itself out towards what critics, I believe, call poetical justice, and I was being the instnunent of all this, and, as I have said, the sole member of the audience who really understood the plot of the play !

When the song and the applause that followed had ended, Mrs. Townley said, addressing us all, 'Now, please, the collection.' The singer took off his hat and held it to one after another of the party of ladies and gentlemen, receiving from each a coin or two. He came towards Mrs. Townley, who had taken her seat some way back from the others, as I guessed with the subject that if anjrthing passed between her and the singer the action should not be visible to the others. He had stepped forward and was reaching out his hat towards her. Just as he was approaching her, I held out my arm and barred his passage. 'Stop,' I said, 'here is my contribution,' and I dropped half a crown into the hat. Then suddenly I took the hat from his hand and handed it myself to Mrs. Townley. I glanced quickly at both their countenances. They kept them admirably. There was a smile on hers, a continued grin on his.

'Thank you, my lord,' he said to me with a mock gratitude.

Mrs. Townley fumbled awkwardly for a moment with her handkerchief, and after a little delay, produced a silver coin.

I had baffled them once again.

Presently Mrs. Townley changed her seat and sat down on the outlying root of a great beech tree. She seemed, for a moment, to be lost in reverie; she began to trace fantastic figures on the bare earth with the point of her parasol.

I went up to Lord Balin and began to talk to him, but my eyes were fixed upon Mrs. Townley's movements.

'Lord Balin,' I said, 'will you manage to let me walk with you alone for a hundred yards, when we go from here? I have something important to ask you.' I spoke below my voice.

'Certainly,' said Lord Balin. 'I will manage that,' and again he began loudly to praise my shooting.

I smiled, and seemed all ears, but my eyes were following the point of Mrs. Townley's parasol.

She had drawn what looked to me like the rude representation of a tennis racket. Mrs. Townley was, I had heard, an enthusiastic tennis player— was her drawing done in mere distraction? We are all given to trace meaningless lines and figures if we happen to hold a stick in our hands, while our thoughts are otherwise engaged. Yet it looked to be the representation of a very palpable racquet. The parasol point had drawn a circle and filled it with cross lines. Then it drew the shape of a handle. It could surely be nothing on earth but a racquet! Then came a strange figure, an arch with a straight line under it.

Finally the figure 7. Could these symbols have any possible meaning for any one? To Coggins? He was still making his rounds of the guests with his hat and grinning out his effusive thanks. He repassed the spot where Mrs. Townley's parasol had been busy. She had hardly raised her eyes for a second as he went by, but, when he had passed, she began at once to obliterate the figures. Presently nothing remained, but the drawn lines were fast in my memory. The figure of the arch, the numeral 7, and a racquet. That it was a signal I had not the slightest doubt— a signal to Coggins, and I knew that if I could not interpret it, the jewels would pass to him and be lost for ever.

An archway, the figure 7, and a racquet.

'Seven might mean seven o'clock— a racquet might indicate the lawn-tennis court— but the archway? I had it— it meant the secluded place beyond the tennis court where the ruins of the Abbey lay, half buried in the turf. One of the remains was an archway. Yes, it clearly indicated the very spot where the jewel settings had been buried. Evidently something was to happen at seven o'clock that evening, or at seven next morning, in this unfrequented spot. I would anticipate the event, whatever it might be, by going there myself at both hours.

"We had another large covert to shoot, and the keepers and beaters went off to take up their line. The ladies started to go home, and Lord Balin and I found ourselves walking across the fields.

'You have had no time to do much yet, I suppose?' he said.

'I have learnt a good deal,' I said, 'in the last half hour.'

'You don't say so, my dear Stanley ! What a wonderful fellow you are! Why, I have hardly had my eye off you all day. You have been busy eating your lunch and laughing and talking with the women. Come, now! What can you have found out?'

'First, I have made sure that the burglar is in league with an inmate in your house.'

'Not a servant?'

'No, not a servant.'

'Mrs.—?' He did not utter the name.

I nodded.

'Are you quite sure?'

'I am quite sure now. I have seen signals passing between her and the burglar who broke into the Abbey.'

'The burglar who broke into— Are you dreaming? My keepers— why I could go bail for the whole of them.'

'So could I, I believe.'

'Then who is the man, and are you sure?'

'The man I mean is Coggins— Gentleman Coggins, the smartest operator in his line, who has been living at Pangford for three weeks past.'

'Yes, I know that; and how can that lady make signals to him there from our beech woods?'

I could see that Lord Balin was beginning to find my statements difficult of belief— perhaps he half doubted my sanity.

'Mrs. Townley,' I said, 'twice tried to pass something to the person I know to be the burglar. Twice I was able to stop her. Then she traced a signal to him with the point of her parasol on the ground.'

'And what did she try to pass?'

'The stolen jewels.'

'What! they are in her possession?'

'Yes.'

'But they would be bulky— all the stolen jewellery together would make too big a parcel to pass.'

'Yes, in their settings— but they have been taken out of the settings. In their present form they would hardly fill a tea cup.'

'How do you know that?'

'Because the settings are here in my pocket.'

I showed them. They were squeezed and pressed together.

'Good heavens!' said Lord Balin. 'Where did they come from?'

I explained how I found them.

Lord Balin could hardly understand it. 'You were at work early,' he said. 'By-the-bye, you have not mentioned one thing. Who is the criminal, the man who has broken into my house, and to whom you say Mrs. Townley twice tried to pass the jewels, and to whom she made signals? Who is this man? Where is he?'

'Joe the beater, the man who sang "Turmut hoeing" to us.'

'Joe the beater!' said Lord Balin, stopping to look me in the face. 'Why, surely not that weak-brained fellow!'

'He is the most dangerous criminal in all London.'

'Is it possible? And I have myself encouraged my keepers to engage him ! He seemed such a merry, harmless sort of fellow, just a rustic innocent. I even suggested that he might be taken on as an under-beater and watcher.'

I told the story of how Sergeant Smith had pursued him, how he had spoilt Smith's bicycle, and then, hiding his own, had turned back disguised (the very disguise he had employed to-day), had sent the Sergeant on a wild goose chase in search of a forge which never existed, and how this self-same innocent rustic had been beating the woods all day, and singing country ditties to us.

'And what can he be doing here?'

'Waiting,' I said, 'to get hold of the jewels.'

'Look here!' said Lord Balin, taking out a whistle and giving three loud blasts on it. That will bring the head keeper here— anyhow, we'll get Joe the beater turned off the place at once,'

I begged Lord Balin to do nothing of the sort. I undertook to watch that he did no harm. If he were sent off, I said, his confederate might devise some new way of hiding, or getting off with, the jewels.

'When the keeper came up I pretended to be interested in Joe and his singing.

'He's a good companionable fellow,' said the keeper. 'We all like him, and as his lordship desires me to engage him as under keeper, we take him with us on the rounds at night.'

'Ah,' thought I, 'that accounts for a good deal.'

Lord Balin sent the keeper back to his duties, and the shooting began.

I am afraid my loaders were less pleased with me during the afternoon shooting than in the morning. The first condition of good shooting is to have one's attention entirely concentrated on the matter in hand. A second lost in recalling one's wandering thoughts is generally the chance of a shot missed, a head of game thrown away. My thoughts wandered all the afternoon. What mischief was my old enemy Towers, now Ikey Coggins, meditating? What did Mrs. Townley's signal mean? What was the signification of the mysterious figure of the racquet? Surely the archway was enough to indicate the spot. The racquet must be a further special signal agreed upon between the confederates to which I had no clue. Mrs. Townley would be at home three hours before me, and would have time to plot many things. I thought of sending a message by one of my loaders to Macgregor to bid him and O'Brien keep watch on her movements. Then I heard the cheery voice of Joe the beater halloaing in the woods, and I thought that, at least while he was with us, no great misfortune could happen.

While my thoughts were thus engaged I missed three rocketers in succession. My head loader, pulling out his whisky flask, remarked that I was a bit off my shooting as compared with the morning. 'This morning, sir,' he was pleased to say, 'you hardly let a thing pass. Perhaps I may make so bold as to recommend a drop of this.'

I took a sip at the proffered flask, and made an effort to pull myself together, with the good result that I knocked down a couple of pheasants right and left almost immediately, and recovered my shooting for the rest of the afternoon.

It was nearly dark when we reached home, and I asked Lord Balin to let me slip off quietly to my room. From my window I saw Mrs. Townley coming back

from the lawn tennis courts. She was an enthusiastic player, and sometimes went out with a boy to field the balls while she practised services by the hour. It was by now so dark that I could not see whether she carried her racquet with her. As soon as she had come in I sent for O'Brien.

'Get me,' I said, 'a stable lantern and carry it un-lighted, with matches, on to the lawn-tennis ground there to wait for me, letting no one see you if you can help it. At what time are the bloodhounds let loose?'

'Not till ten, or half past if no carriage-folk are coming to the Abbey or going away. They are that fierce they'd be after the horses in a carriage and pulling the coachman off his box.'

'Whistle twice in answer to me, softly, when you hear me coming.'

'I will, sir.'

It was half past six. I stole out a few minutes afterwards, wrapped in an ulster. I stumbled up the walk in the pitch darkness, giving a low whistle when I thought I was near the tennis ground. Then I made toward O'Brien's double whistle.

'Here I am, sir,' came O'Brien's whisper close to me.

'Light the lantern,' I whispered, 'and keep your body between it and the house.'

He struck three or four matches before he succeeded in getting it alight.

'Don't throw the matches down,' I whispered. 'Put them in your pocket.'

'I'm doing that, sir,' said O'Brien.

I took the lantern in my hand and lighted our way to the Abbey ruins. I held it high up and could make out no one and nothing. We walked slowly all round the space occupied by the ruined remains.

'Is that what you're looking for, sir?' said O'Brien, pointing to the ruined archway.

'I see nothing.'

'It's a spade, or something like it, leaning against that bit of ruined arch,' said O'Brien, walking towards it.

'Is it a tennis racquet, O'Brien?'

'I'm thinking it may be, sir. Yes, 'tis just that very identical thing.'

He handed me a large, heavy, substantial racquet.

'One of the ladies has been playing in the court,' I said, 'and forgot to bring in her racquet.'

'Sure, 'tis a mighty heavy tool for a lady to handle, sir.'

'Yes,' I said, 'and I'd choose a lighter one myself for convenience. O'Brien, my man,' I said, weighing the racquet in my hand, 'I'm thinking we may have found what we came down to Balin Abbey to look for. Go in now and open the side door, which is bolted inside. See here, I button this racquet under my

ulster. I don't want to go through the hall where the ladies and gentlemen are and let any of them guess at what I'm carrying. Then you'll bring Macgregor up to my bedroom, and perhaps Fll show you both something queer.'

When the two officers were in my room I bade them lock the door.

'If I'm not mistaken,' I said, taking up the racquet, 'here is the end of all our trouble.'

The two detectives looked upon me as one who has taken leave of his senses. The handle of the racquet had, what many racquets have, a roughened covering of reddish indiarubber. I pulled it off, and the handle at first sight seemed to be fashioned just like the handle of any other racquet, but a close inspection showed an unusually large protuberance at the end. It seemed to be jointed to the handle, but our united strength could not pull it off, or unscrew it. Macgregor happened to have a little steel wrench, belonging to his motor car, in his pocket. He closed down the holder on the protuberance and held it fast while I turned the racquet in his hands. The screw worked loose, and presently the top was off, showing that a hole about three-quarters of an inch in diameter had been bored down into the whole length of the handle.

I looked in and saw that the cavity was packed tight with pink cotton wool.

'Which of you has a corkscrew?' I asked.

The Scotsman and the Irishman each produced, in great haste, a neat extracting tool. I spread a sheet of newspaper on the table, entangled the point of the corkscrew with the cotton wool in the handle of the racquet and gave the screw a turn. I drew forth a great hank of cotton wool. As the cotton fell upon the table, gems of extraordinary size came tumbling out with it—some remained embedded in the cotton, some leapt out upon the paper—emeralds, green as grass, flat, and as large as a man's forefinger nail, great blood-red rubies, some faceted, some cabochon-shaped, sapphires, blue as southern skies, and diamonds of uncommon size and brilliancj, and this profusion of precious things lay on the table between us three men, under the three-fold light of the electric lamps above our heads, shining and glistening as if they were living, moving things.

There is, I think, something almost awe-inspiring about precious stones of such lustre and size to persons unaccustomed to see and handle them. The two men retired a step or two from the great treasure before them.

'There's enough to fill the windows of a dozen jewellers' shops in Bond Street,' said the practical Scotsman.

'Bedad ! It's nothing short of a king's ransom,' said the more poetical Irishman.

I carefully turned up the comers of the newspaper and made a small parcel of the gems.

'See, Macgregor, if there's any more inside the racquet.'

Macgregor banged the handle of the racquet down on the table — nothing came out. Then Macgregor held up the racquet to the electric light and squinted into the hole. 'It's all out, sir.'

'We must leave it as it was. I will spare you some of the cotton wool to repack it with.'

It amused the men to drop bits of coal from the grate into the cavity that had contained the gems, to fill up the interstices with cotton wool, pack all tightly, replace the top, screw it on tightly, and roll on the indiarubber handle cover.

'Now,' I said to Macgregor, 'carry it down— dont let any one see you, and hang it up in the passage near the conservatory with the other lawn tennis things.'

Macgregor presently returned. It was now a quarter to eight, and I was dressing as fast as I could for dinner. He returned to report to me that as soon as he had finished hanging up the racquet with the others, he had gone towards the conservatory, just, as he said, from curiosity to find out if the door leading out was locked at that early hour of the night. As he went towards it he encountered Mrs. Townley coming in from outside through the conservatory. She was wrapped round in a long sealskin cloak, but, for all that, he could see that she was carrying some sort of a bundle underneath it.

'Very odd,' I said. 'What do you make of that, Macgregor?'

'I make nothing of it, sir, but it seems queer that a young lady should be out at this hour of the night and come in carrying a big bundle.'

'Did she pass through the passage where you had hung the racquet?'

'She did, sir, and I was close behind her.'

'Did she seem to notice that you had put back the racquet in its place?'

'She hurried through the passage and looked neither to right nor left.'

'Is the night still very dark, Macgregor?'

'Very dark and overcast, after the fine day, and a little drizzle of rain has set in.'

'There's no moon, I think, Macgregor, to-night?'

'Not till the small hours, sir, by the almanack, and but little then.'

'A good night for cracking a crib, eh?' I remarked, dressing in haste.

'Well, sir,' said Macgregor, smiling, 'not with those four savage bloodhounds roaming round the house.'

'What would you say, Macgregor, if our friend Coggins had not only humbugged Sergeant Smith, but had got round the keepers here, and even Lord Balin himself? He has been going the rounds every night with the

watchers. The hounds must know him by now, and he can come and go as he will by night or day. What do you say to that?'

O'Brien stood with my white tie in his hand.

He laughed. 'That beats all, sir! That's cleverness, if you like, but don't let him beat us, sir, for the dear Lord's sake ! don't let him beat us!'

'I'm thinking,' said Macgregor, 'that going the rounds won't help him far with the dogs. They've a kennel of a dozen of them here. The head keeper showed it me to-day. Bloodthirsty brutes, every one of them. I'd sooner face four hungry tigers from the Zoo. Ever since the burglary here these four fresh hounds have been let loose every night.'

'That's good news, anyhow,' I said. 'Keep a sharp look out all the same, you two. See that the conservatory door is locked-r-keep my window open, and one of you stay in the room without a light burning. You may chance to hear or see something. I'll be back with you as soon as I can.'

I hurried down, but I was not the last. Mrs. Townley was still to appear, and she kept the party waiting. When she did at last come in, she abounded in pretty apologies— smiling, nervous, I thought, but full of life and movement. She wore a resplendent red dress with embroidery of seed pearl, and a great string of large oriental pearls coiled twice round her neck and the ends hanging down. Pearls, she had told me, were her favourite wear. We were told she had lost a necklace of great pearls and diamonds in the burglary, as well as two pendants of pearl and diamond of great price. She deplored these losses hourly, but the wealth of this beautiful woman even after her losses impressed us all immensely. I remarked to myself, as I admired the superb pearls on her neck, that we had not discovered one single pearl among the wealth of precious stones hidden in the racquet. The fact, of course, had nothing astonishing for me.

I took an opportunity of telling Lord Balin that I had good news for him, but that I would beg him to allow me to say nothing till the morning. 'The night,' I said,

may bring its further developments.'

7: Further Developments

WE spoke at dinner of the wonderful voice and cleverness of the beater, Joe. Mrs. Townley was particularly loud in her praises, and I myself was quite as enthusiastic about him as she. Such a man, I said, was much more than a clever village singer, he had artistic and other talents too, and I was sure it would not be long before he was heard of in London.

Lord Balin's eye met mine, but he did not smile.

'We shall miss him when he leaves us!' he said, and he pinched his lips together as if a sudden emotion held him. Knowing Lord Balin's sense of humour, I feared an explosion, and hastened to change the subject. I spoke of the last woodcock that had got up out of shot and had never been seen again. A woodcock is a subject of conversation that will always take English sportsmen from any other talk.

When I got upstairs it was nearly twelve o'clock. O'Brien and Macgregor were both in my room, the lights turned off and the windows open. The four hounds had been let loose an hour before, they told me, and the keepers gone home. Leaning out of the window, I could just hear the patter of the bloodhounds' feet, and their panting breath, as these fierce creatures ranged over the grass plots and through the shrubberies round the house.

'The moon,' I said, 'rises at three o'clock. If nothing happens between this and then, we may all go to bed,'

I had an Intuition that something would happen, because I knew the burglar, being disappointed at not finding the jewels in the racquet, as he had been promised, would take some further steps to get hold of them.

Assuming that he guessed nothing of the arrival of myself and my two subordinates, and there was indeed nothing to betray any of us to Mrs. Townley, or to himself, he would naturally conclude that his accomplice had been prevented by an accident from keeping her word. He would never dream that so clever a woman had been outwitted. The jewels were therefore, he would think, still in her possession, and he would, probably, present himself under his confederate's window at some appointed hour in the night and Mrs. Townley would throw out to him the packet of jewels. This simple and obvious way of getting hold of the jewels had, till now, been rendered impossible in my eyes by the fact that the grounds were closely patrolled by keepers every night up to a certain hour, and after that by fierce blood-hounds.

But the keeper's revelation that day shook my confidence in the dogs, for, if Coggins went about at night with the watchers and their dogs, these latter would naturally get used to him. I had no doubt that it had been Coggins's original intention to get hold of the jewels in this simple manner. But then, after the night of the robbery, the head keeper, to make things safe, had, as I have said, let loose four instead of two hounds, and Coggins would of course be a stranger to two of these animals, if not to all four. So, to get the jewels, he had to resort to other methods. Hence the attempts of Mrs. Townley to pass the jewels in the wood and the later manceuvre of the tennis racquet. Now that he had been baffled in every attempt, what would he do next? He could not know, yet, that the stolen property had passed for good out of his confidante's possession. What did the heavy bundle brought in by Mrs.

Townley portend? What could it contain except some means of getting into the house, possibly a rope ladder, or, more likely, one of those knotted ropes which have lately become a common implement in a modern housebreaker's trade? Did Coggins meditate breaking in, a second time, into Balin Abbey ? I was pretty sure that he did— not for purposes of robbery, but to secure the booty he had obtained through his confederate.

I had made a fair guess, but I had really no idea to what lengths the audacity and insolence of this Prince of Professional Burglars were prepared to carry him.

7: Coggins's Crowning Effort

THERE was an empty bedroom in one of the two towers which rise on either front of Balin Abbey. I had Lord Balin's permission to use it for purposes of observation, and I directed Macgregor to go thither and watch. He came to me in about half an hour to report that he could hear nothing of the hounds. Grenerally one or other of them were on the move all through the night, and their footsteps could be heard, or their panting as they galloped slowly across the turf, or the rustling of the evergreens as they pushed their way through the shrubberies; to-night he had not heard a sign of them.

'The scoundrel has drugged them or poisoned them,' I said.

'It looked like it.

'Then he means to be up to something to-night,' said O'Brien.

'Go back to the tower, Macgregor, and watch for what happens. Go, both of you, and keep a good look out, and let O'Brien come here and report when you notice anything.'

The tower stands out from the comer of the main building, and the windows command full views of two sides of the house, of the front and of the western side where the conservatory is and to which Mrs. Townley and my rooms look. Only on this side can the house be broken Into. Here, then, was the point of danger.

I had waited in the dark for nearly two hours, and, tired out with my day's shooting and my many anxieties, was all but asleep, with my arms on the table and my head resting on them, when O'Brien opened the door hastily and said in a loud whisper:

'The rascal's at work, sir!'

'What's happened?' I asked, hardly daring to believe the good news.

'We heard Mrs. Townley open her window just now, and chuck something out.'

'The knotted rope!'

'We can't see a thing, the night's so thick, but we can hear him climbing up against the creepers on the wall, hand over hand.'

'Send Macgregor here, and you run to the two constables below and tell them to post themselves in the passage leading to the conservatory. There is no hurry. There let them stay till they hear me give three stamps on the floor overhead. Then they are to run out and nab any one coming down a rope from Mrs. Townley's window. Explain it all clearly to them, O'Brien. Let them stick closely to my instructions; and then you come back quietly into my room. Pull your boots off as you come upstairs.'

Macgregor and I waited a good ten minutes. We removed our boots as a matter of precaution. Presently O'Brien entered the room barefoot. We had heard, or thought we heard, some one stirring in Mrs. Townley's room, but it was only after some minutes' waiting that we heard the door softly open. We waited a few minutes. Then I opened the door of my room and listened. I could hear the sound of stockinged feet some way up the corridor. I knew it must be Coggins. I followed the footsteps, after whispering to Macgregor to follow on some yards behind me.

'What is he at?' I wondered, as I cautiously went forward through the darkness in the direction of the footfall. To what was he leading me? I wondered, for he did not go in the direction of the living part of the house.

He seemed to know every inch of the way in the dark, and turned sharp to the right and left more than once.

Finally he came to a sudden stop. I heard the opening of a door ; he went forward, half closing it behind him. I waited for a moment to let Macgregor come up. I could see now that the burglar carried a dark lantern with him. He turned it on, flashing the light upon the walls. To my astonishment he had entered the famous picture gallery of Balin Abbey. I saw the light of his lantern flash upon great luminous canvases of Rubens, upon sweet portraits of girls by Romney and Reynolds, upon masterpieces of Velasquez and Titian. Was O'Brien's prediction come true? Was the rascal coveting some of the works of the great masters which Lady Drusilla told me the Mr. Townley, whom I made no doubt was Coggins, had once criticised so acutely. I almost laughed at the fellow's audacity.

This certainly was his object, and he now set to work to carry it out. He began with a beautiful picture of three nymphs in a woodland landscape by Rubens. It was a picture full of a golden and rosy light, and the bright surface reflected the gleam of the bull's-eye lantern carried at his waist-belt. The reflected light clearly revealed all his movements in outline. He took from his pocket a knife and cut along the bottom line of the inner frame, then as high as

he could reach on each side. Then, standing on a table which he had moved in front of the picture, he cut along the top and sides. In another moment he had put up his two hands and was steadily ripping the canvas down and off the backing of the frame, with a dull rasping noise as when a saw passes through soft wood ; then he turned, and for a moment we could see his face and the knife with its gleaming blade between his teeth. I saw, too, the handle of a revolver protruding from his breast pocket.

He leaped lightly from the table and rolled the canvas up. His actions were almost monkey-like in their nimbleness. He moved the table to another picture and we saw the light stream upon it. It was the portrait of a lady in a grey dress slashed with black and embroidered with silver lace on the shoulders and sleeves— the portrait of a young queen, by Velasquez— a face with a proud, disdainful smile. I saw him use his knife upon this lifelike presentment of a noble woman, with something of the horror with which I should see him prepare to attack a living human being. The painted face and figure formed a point of light in that great vault of blackness which is before me at this moment that I speak to you as vividly as I saw it that night.

Macgregor pressed forward as Coggins passed the knife quickly round the edge of the picture. I laid my hand on his shoulder and whispered 'Wait!' in his ear.

When the burglar put up his hand and began drawing off the canvas from the back, I took advantage of the sound of tearing to throw wide open the door and, together, we rushed in upon the burglar. Together, we leaped up at him on the table, but before we could reach him he had heard us, turned, taken the knife in one hand and drawn the revolver with the other. Macgregor had seized one wrist, I the other, in the uncertain light. The table fell, and all three of us lay struggling on the ground. One barrel of the revolver went off, and he stabbed at us both repeatedly with the knife. The burning powder singed my hair, but the ball struck neither of us, and after a minute Macgregor got the pistol from him. He had struck Macgregor once savagely with the knife on the shoulder, but I had hold of his wrist and the blow glanced, and though it cut through the cloth of Macgregor's coat, it only just grazed the skin. The struggle on the floor lasted but a minute or two. Then we overmastered him. O'Brien ran up as we held him and slipped the handcuffs over his wrists. The Irishman picked up the lantern, which had fallen to the ground and had cast only a flickering and uncertain light during our fight with the criminal. Not a word had been spoken by any of us.

'Take him to the room in the tower, Macgregor,' I whispered in Macgregor's ear, 'and answer no questions if the prisoner asks any. Make no noise as you go.'

I had expected the gallery to fill at once with people from the house, roused by the crash of the falling table, and more still by the report of the pistol, but nothing of the sort happened. The picture gallery lies far away from the inhabited portion of the Abbey, being reached through long and tortuous corridors. The door had shut to as Macgregor and I rushed in, and though the noise of the pistol discharge seemed deafening to us, as it reverberated through the vaulted roof of the gallery, it turned out that not a soul but ourselves had heard anything.

I went downstairs and brought up the two officers from their post near the conservatory. I told them we had captured our man, and that their duty would be to watch him during the night.

It was now nearly three o'clock. By daylight I was up again and had gone out. I saw the keepers assembled on the lawn. They were greatly disturbed by the non-appearance of the bloodhounds. The dogs had not answered, as usual, to the keepers' call, and a search in the shrubberies presently resulted in finding the bodies of all four of them lying dead and stark.

I spent two hours in writing a report to my chief. I felt that luck had greatly befriended me all through— I had succeeded in every point. I had recovered the lost jewels. I had brought the robbery home to the actual thieves— that is, morally brought it home, for even now it was doubtful if legal evidence could have been brought against Coggins for the jewel robbery, but I had established a clear case of burglary in the matter of the pictures against the man suspected so often and never yet in durance for an hour.

It was nine o'clock. I dressed and sent in word to Lord Balin that I would like to see him before breakfast.

I said, 'My business is done. I have found the stolen jewels— here they are,' and I laid the paper parcel before him. 'One of the thieves was Mrs. Townley, but the instigator and real criminal was Coggins, alias Towers, who is the husband of Mrs. Townley. The man Coggins broke into the Abbey last night for the second time, and we were able to arrest him in the very act of stealing your pictures. He is now a prisoner in the tower room. No one in the house knows anything of the matter, not even Mrs. Townley.'

'Stop! Stop!' said Lord Balin, raising his hands. 'You overwhelm me! What! found the jewels and arrested the thief? Why— why, you are the most extraordinary fellow in the whole world— you shoot my pheasants for me when I couldn't get any one else to, you entertain my guests as no one else does— and now, in a turn of the hand, you find the lost property and arrest the thief. You are a wonderful fellow, my dear Stanley!'

'Morgan now. Lord Balin— Sergeant Morgan, at your service. The comedy is over.'

'Nothing is over, Morgan— if you will let me call you that and,' he added, holding out his hand, 'and my friend; and do not forget that I owe you a debt of gratitude that I shall never be able to discharge.'

Then he changed the subject suddenly. 'And that poor woman, Morgan? What are we to do with her— arrest her too, charge her with the theft, and get her put into prison?'

'It seems hard upon her,' I said; 'she acted under the influence and compulsion of her husband.'

'It is damned hard, Morgan. Though I confess I never liked the woman; but a pretty woman and my guest! No, no!'

'The moral evidence,' I said, 'against Mrs. Townley is overwhelming— the legal evidence almost nil. I doubt if we could secure a conviction. I have told my chief so. Counsel for her defence would be sure to argue. If she was the thief, why did Coggins run the risk of breaking into the house?'

'To be sure,' said Lord Balin, 'why did he?'

'Because he would know that he couldn't trust her to do the trick herself. It takes pluck, nerve and experience which no ordinary woman possesses. Even if she had all the will in the world, Mrs. Townley could not have gone through the rooms single-handed and stolen the jewels herself.'

'Then you think he did it alone?'

'Alone or together, who can tell?'

'I tell you what, Morgan. Let's think it over presently. Come in to breakfast now— the second gong has gone long ago— come in and be Robert Stanley once more. Let us ignore everything for the moment and see what this wretched woman will do and say.'

'Remember,' I said, 'that she can know nothing as yet. My men are to be trusted, and they won't have spoken to any one in the house. The man passed through her bedroom towards the picture gallery. She certainly knew his errand, for he had brought a dark lantern and a sharp-cutting knife with him. He did not return. She would guess that he found it best to make his escape in some other way than back through her room, for she, having heard nothing of the struggle, would naturally conclude that her friend got safe off.'

'Just so,' said Lord Balin. 'I will call her in here after breakfast and tell her what has happened. I shall tell her she must leave my house at once and for good, but I will tell her also that, so far as I am concerned, I will not prosecute her. If the authorities choose to press for a prosecution it shall not be my act or by my advice.'

I thought that line was equitable, and I said so. I ventured to doubt if it were strictly legal.

Lord Balln laughed. 'Law be hanged, Morgan! equity and poetical justice forever! But come to breakfast; you must be hungry after your night's work.'

We had sat down and taken our places before Mrs. Townley entered the room. I cannot say that her face was pale, for it was more highly coloured than ever, but her unquiet eyes and her trembling mouth told the tale of the night's anguish. Lord Balin greeted her with no change of his accustomed morning cordiality. She was more carefully, more exquisitely dressed than usual, and her hair seemed to have undergone the attentions of a professional hair-dresser. She talked and laughed freely, but I could see that she looked and listened for any stray revelation of the events of that terrible night.

The butler came in and spoke in a low voice to Lord Balin.

His Lordship half rose from his seat in anger. 'Poisoned them! What! all four? Confound the sneaking villain!' Then he sat down, having mastered his wrath.

'I beg your pardon,' he said, turning to his guests, 'but what do you think? The scoundrel who robbed this house three days ago, and who has been hanging about the neighbourhood for weeks past, has poisoned four of my bloodhounds!'

I looked at Mrs. Townley. She gave a nervous start, and a shudder shook her whole body for a moment. Lord Balin caught sight of her frightened face, and in a moment his chivalry to a guest and a woman came back to him.

He smiled and changed the subject. So did the meal pass off, and I could not but marvel at the possibility of what may happen in a great house, in the night-time, in the way of moving human drama, and its inmates, guests and servants, have no inkling of what has passed.

'Mrs. Townley,' said Lord Balin, but so much in his usual tone that I could see it did not alarm his guest, 'I have some news for you. Will you join me in the library presently?'

Then he left his guests, giving me a look to follow him. Mrs. Townley rose to leave the room. I opened the door for her, and followed her into Lord Balin's private room.

He motioned her to a seat and began at once.

'It is very painful, Mrs. Townley, for me to have to say what I am going to. Don't please interrupt me till I have quite finished, and then say what you will.'

Lord Balin's tone was not stem. It was rather sad, but he spoke without hesitation.

'I want to speak to you about the robbery of jewels here three days ago. This gentleman'— he looked at me— is an officer of the detective service, and he authorises me to say that the settings of the lost gems were found hidden

among the Abbey Ruins; the gems themselves, which you twice endeavoured to pass to the disguised burglar—'

'Lord Balin!' exclaimed the unhappy woman.

Lord Balin went on: 'The stones themselves were finally found, as had been indicated by you in a signal to the man Coggins, in the handle of your racquet.'

Mrs. Townley groaned and hid her face.

'They are all there,' said Lord Balin, pointing to a cabinet, 'except the pearls and diamonds which you told us you had lost. We have reason to know that your husband broke into this house on the 23rd, and went or induced you to go to the rooms of the persons who had drunk of the barley water that you had drugged.'

Mrs. Townley groaned again.

'Your husband broke in for the second time again last night, passing through your bedroom. He intended to rob me of the pictures which he had admired at his visit here, and of which no one knew better than himself the value.'

When Lord Balin had got so far, Mrs. Townley probably made sure that her husband had baffled the police once more and got safely away. She looked up, smiled through her tears, and shook her head.

'He was arrested in the very act,' Lord Balin went on, 'and will stand his trial for burglary.'

The woman's face fell, she almost shrieked out the word 'Arrested!'

Lord Balin bowed. 'You do not, I suppose, seek to deny any part of what I have said?'

The unhappy woman muttered some incoherent words, and again hid her face in her hands.

'I have no intention of prosecuting you, Mrs. Townley. I shall advise the authorities not to do so, on the ground that you acted under the compulsion of your husband.'

Mrs. Townley raised her head, with something of a reprieved look in her face.

'Lord Balin! you are very generous to me— very generous'— she wept— 'to a most unhappy woman— guilty, yes, but, oh, if you could only know—'

'Mrs. Townley,' said Lord Balin, almost kindly, 'I wish to force no confession from you, but one thing I must tell you. You must leave my house at once, pretexting some sudden call of business. You will do so without again seeing my other guests. I will not betray you to them. Now go,' he said more sternly, 'and make your preparations to leave. The carriage will take you to the station in two hours' time from now.'

'Mrs. Townley got up, and without any leave-taking quitted the room. Again, as before, I opened the door to let her go out.

'Lord Balin,' said I, 'may I ask you a favour?'

'May you ask me!' said my host, smiling.

'It is that you will allow me to have a parting interview with a lady I have reason to respect very greatly.'

'My cousin, Drusilla Lancaster?'

'Yes.'

Lord Balin rang the bell and told the butler to beg Lady Drusilla Lancaster to come to the library in order to hear some important news.

'Tell her, please,' I said, 'when she comes, who I am and why I came here.'

'I will, Morgan,' said Lord Balin; 'I will, my dear fellow; but, I say, we won't give that poor woman away even to Lady Drusilla?'

'No! no! On no account.'

'Drusilla,' said Lord Balin, 'I have a confession to make to you, and to you alone, mind, from my friend here. He is not Robert Stanley; he is Mr. Morgan, of the detective service.'

'I thought he was too nice for a millionaire,' said Lady Drusilla, smiling, and otherwise unimpressed.

'I owe him an enormous debt of gratitude,' Lord Balin went on. 'He has recovered all the jewels that were stolen here, and he has arrested the thief.'

'The thief?' asked Lady Drusilla, with a curiously shrewd look.

'Yes, the famous burglar, Coggins— Grentleman Coggins, who has baffled the whole London police for four years. Last night he made an attempt upon my picture gallery, and Mr. Morgan arrested him in the act.'

'Well done!' said Lady Drusilla, turning to me.

'I have begged Lord Baling I said, 'to give me the chance of apologising to you for the miserable part I played with you *

'Miserable part !' exclaimed Lady Drusilla; 'Why, this sort of thing is nearly the only real action possible in this tame age. In my eyes— Mr.— Mr.— what am I to call you?'

'Morgan, said Lord Balin.

'In my eyes, Mr. Morgan, you are a knight errant— you think and you act in the interests of the rest of us, and that is to be the only sort of knight errant and hero possible in these days.'

She came forward and took my hand in both hers.

'Mr. Morgan, you and I are going to be great friends, are we not?' she laughed. 'Do, if you please, come and have tea with me in Hill Street, next Friday.'

I have nothing more to say about this case at Balin Abbey except this. My short twenty-four hours' work at Balin Abbey won me inspectorship, and, on my favourable report, Macgregor and O'Brien were promoted to be Sergeants.

But I have gained what I esteem even more highly, the life-long friendship of my host at the Abbey and of Lady Drusilla Lancaster.

The authorities took Lord Balin's advice and did not prosecute Mrs. Townley.

Gentleman Coggins, alias Towers, alias Townley, got five years' penal servitude.

Mrs. Townley resumed her luxurious life in Park Lane. Her jewels, her dress, her motor cars, her yacht, her chef, her charming dinners, her bridge evenings (when the play runs high) are more than ever the talk of the town. She is said to be the richest grass widow on this side of the Atlantic ; for she admits herself that grass widow is now quite an applicable name for her. 'It is too bad of my husband,' she says; 'He never seems to have time to come home. One day I get a postcard from Pekin telling me of how he has a valuable concession from the Dowager Empress, two months later a wire comes from South America, then he is heard of in Japan! It is very hard upon his poor wife.'

The supposed financial wanderer is, however, still doing time at Broadmoor, and we, in the force, are wondering whether, when he comes out, he will resume the very lucrative business of Ikey Coggins or the far less profitable but safer profession of city financier. We hope he will continue in the burglaring rather than the financing line. We know more now about Gentleman Coggins than we did, and believe we could catch him tripping; anyhow, we can always follow a criminal in that line with some hopes of running him in, whereas the person who practises the more speculative branches of the profession is mostly quite beyond the reach of the law.

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2: Hung on Wire

Ernest M. Poate

1884-1935

Detective Story Magazine, 15 Aug 1925

IT WAS five o'clock. The boss, who was so particular about starting the milking on time, had not showed up.

For a few minutes, Peter Brady went on absently bunching the fragrant clover; then, with a worried glance at the sun, he started for the house, trailing his pitchfork.

"Oh, Mis' Madison!" he shouted into the kitchen door. "If them pails is ready, I expect I better take 'em out, and start milkin'."

An old lady thrust out her white head. "I expect you better had, Pete," she answered nervously. "The pails is all ready, right in the milk house. I don't know what's keepin' Henry. The boy's always so prompt."

"Where's Ralph?" asked the hired man. "I sh'd think he c'd help a feller oncet in a while,"

The little old lady creased her apron with unsteady fingers. "Oh, Ralph—why, Ralph, he went to the village 'long 'bout four o'clock,"

Brady nodded rather sullenly and turned away. "Might know he'd dodge milkin' time," he muttered to himself. "Dang good fer nothin'. Oh, well, I s'pose he's too strong to work. But it beats my time what Henry Madison wanted with keepin' such a gosh blame loafer 'round the place."

He whistled shrilly. "Where's that dang dawg?" Then he stepped into the milk house, and emerged with half a dozen nested pails, which he carried into the long, low basement of the cow barn. This was strictly against the rules; but

if the boss couldn't come home to attend the milking he'd have to stand for it being done the best way it could. Thus mutinously thinking, Brady slammed the pails down on the cow-barn floor, and whistled again. "Here Shep, Shep! C'me 'ere b'fore I kick your dang head off!"

Thus apostrophized, Shep appeared from his cool hollow beneath the milk house, one foot at a time, yawning tremendously. He glanced at the hired man, and immediately assumed an expression of sheepish guilt. Mechanically he dodged the kick which Brady as mechanically proffered; and an entente was established.

"C'me on, Shep," invited the man. "Go fetch 'em!"

Flag waving, the dog bounded happily off down the long lane toward the hill pasture. Brady yawned widely, and propped himself against the side of the open cow-stable door. He chuckled; then put both hands-to his mouth, and sent a long, mellow call ringing up the hillside: ''Co-bo-oo-oo-oss!"

He idled, calling at intervals, for another ten or fifteen minutes, perversely putting off what he knew he should have done at once. For the hill pasture was large, and contained a wood lot; the most intelligent cow dog could scarcely round up the herd without considerable difficulty.

But neither Henry Madison nor Henry's cousin appeared to help him; so finally, muttering to himself, the hired man started sullenly down the long lane. Halfway down, he stopped just this side of the rough bridge which spanned a small creek, and shouted once more. "Coboss! Go git 'em, Shep." Here the thick growth of willows on either side obscured his view. There were no cows in sight. He muttered profanely, and stamped impatiently on across the bridge. "Beats all Henry Madison wouldn't Great gosh a'mighty !"

For perhaps thirty seconds Brady stood rigid, with an odd expression upon his broad, stolid features. His little, pale eyes stared stupidly at something hung upon the woven-wire fence at the left of the lane. At first glance, it seemed a mere bag of clothes, a scarecrow carelessly thrown aside; it was so limp, so motionless.

Yet it was no scarecrow. It was the body of a heavily built young man, pitifully limp and flaccid. Obviously, the man was dead. The body lay half suspended from the top of the low three-strand wire fence; its chin was hooked over this wire, which sagged low with the weight. The face was invisible, looking downward, overhung by a shock of thick, black hair; on the other side of the fence, the arms dropped loosely, and the trunk sprawled backward to wide-thrown, half-bent legs, so that the dead man seemed to have pitched forward from a kneeling posture to be prevented by the wire from falling on his face.

"Great gosh a'mighty!" repeated the awestruck Brady. "Looks like he had his last fit." He grinned mirthlessly.

He advanced half fearfully toward the body, but did not touch it. Thus he stood for an uneasy moment, stupidly wondering at the dark-purple flush of the half-hidden face, which was cut off so cleanly by that strangling wire. At last he scratched his head, his brow corrugafed with unaccustomed thought.

"I s'pose I oughta tell somebody," he muttered,

He half turned, cast back one uneasy glance at that still body, and started slowly toward the house. After a few steps, he stopped again to glance over his shoulder; then he went on faster, and faster, until he was running at top speed.

Peter Brady burst into the house; his face was distorted, unhealthily mottled with bluish red; his eyes bulged, his breath rattled hoarsely in his throat.

"Mis' Madison," he wheezed, almost voiceless. "Mis Madison! We gotta have a doctor— Henry's out there—" He broke off abruptly, to turn that apprehensive glance over his shoulder.

The little old lady dropped a frying pan, so that it rang vibrantly upon the scrubbed floor. "My Henry's dead," she declared evenly. Her face was perfectly placid. "Where is he?" A brief pause, then: "He had a fit, I suppose?"

Gradually, her veined old hands began to tremble; a visible tremor ran over her whole bent, shrunken body. Her withered lips twitched; and then the frozen calm of her face was suddenly broken up into a pathetically unbeautiful distortion.

"I— I don't know what to do," she quavered, wringing her hands. "What shall I do?"

"Send fer Doc Sanders, I s'pose," grunted Brady. "He's the coroner." He spoke with mild scorn, his own agitation calmed by the old lady's tragic ineptitude.

Mrs. Madison threw her apron over her head. "I wisht you'd see to things, Pete," she implored. "Henry, he— always said you was the best hired man he'd ever had here."

Peter Brady nodded sullenly. "Aw right," he agreed ungraciously, and stamped out. His moment of excitement was past; he reacted according to type. "This aint what I was hired for," he grumbled beneath his breath. "Pity she c'dn't have done it herself; anyways, where's that dang Ralph? He's too brash, that feller; I'd like to see him git his comeuppance!"

He walked around the house, looking this way and that for the sorrel mare which Ralph Madison had driven. Then he re-entered, and marched sulkily through to the front hall, where he wound the crank of the wall telephone. "Gimme Doc Sanders," he demanded.

"Doc Sanders? That you, doc? Say, you'd better come out here; Henry Madison's dead. Huh? Yeah, a fit. Hung himself over the fence. What? Naw, I ain't touched him, ner I ain't a-gonna. Huh? A' right, if I gotto."

He hung up the receiver, muttering, and marched reluctantly back toward the body of his erstwhile employer, to mount guard until the coroner should come.

For fifteen minutes he stood upon the little bridge, with his eyes carefully averted from that still form. The cows drifted past, one by one, their milking time long past; from the barnyard the sound of uneasy lowing began to arise.

At last, upon the road that ran some two hundred yards away, Peter Brady perceived a distant cloud of dust, from which emerged a lean, long-headed horse, traveling swiftly, with the curious rocking motion of the pacer. "Bout time Ralph was gettin' back," muttered Brady. "Bet he founders that mare

some day, an' then Henry'll—" And there he paused, remembering that Henry could no longer protest. "By 'mighty! Wy, the mare belongs to Ralph now—and the whole dang place! Huh. I expect I'd better quit!"

At the opposite end of the long road a new and larger cloud of dust appeared, and advanced rapidly, accompanied by a rising clamor. "There's Doc Sanders, now. Him and Ralph'll get there about the same time."

The clamant dust cloud neared, and from it emerged a rattling, disreputable motor car, still decorated with the mud stains of last spring; yet it must have been sound beneath the mud, for Doctor Sanders drove furiously.

"Got Doc Pettibone with him, looks like," speculated Brady, and raised a long, carrying shout: "Ah-hoo!"

In the racing car, now opposite, some one turned a head; Peter Brady waved his arms violently, semaphore fashion. An arm was tossed up in answer; and the car roared on, to turn into the Madisons' driveway.

Peter Brady grunted, and sat down on the edge of the bridge, his back carefully turned to the body. He produced a noisome pipe, and stuffed it moodily. "They'll talk, and talk,' he grumbled. "What's the use? Anybody c'd see what killed him. Heck, I wisht it had of b'n Ralph!"

Presently three small figures appeared at the end of the lane, and came swiftly on. Between the two physicians walked Ralph Madison; tall, slimly erect, and darkly handsome. His slender, wellkept hands were busy; he talked rapidly, his large, brown eyes moving from one companion to the other. His narrow face quivered with grief.

On his left walked Doctor Sanders, short and slight, emaciated, consumed with nervous energy. He walked jerkily, smoking so fast that he seemed to be burning inside, for a continuous plume of smoke floated behind him. On the other side walked Doctor Pettibone, large, rotund, and ponderous, monumentally calm.

The three passed Peter Brady, and went on toward the body. The hired man, ignored, scrambled to his feet and slouched after them. Ralph Madison stepped forward, wringing his hands. "Oh, Henry! Poor Henry!" he cried throatily.

"Yahr!" snorted Pete Brady.

While Ralph stood at one side, his hands decorously covering his face, the two physicians advanced toward the body. "Well, well, well!" barked Doctor Sanders irritably. "Ought to take him down, first thing; don't look decent to leave him."

Doctor Pettibone removed his flat-crowned derby hat, to wipe a vast expanse of forehead that was dead white, despite the July sun. "We might—

ah, make an examination *in situ* first, perhaps," he offered suavely. "Perhaps, the jury—"

The smaller physician writhed with annoyance. "The jury'll take what I tell them!" he declared.

None the less, he approached the body without touching it; and for a moment the large pale doctor and the small red one leaned over that unmoving figure with professional interest.

"Perfectly simple— obvious," declared Doctor Sanders. "Strangulation during an epileptic fit."

"Ah— quite so," agreed Doctor Pettibone, softly, chafing his large, pale hands together. "Mechanical asphyxia during a grand mal epileptiform convulsion."

His attention distracted by a noise from the direction of the road, Doctor Sanders jerked quickly about, and began to stare. ''Heavens!" he said. "Here comes the "epileptologist.' Now, how on earth

"Ah!" remarked Doctor Pettibone blandly. His large, pale face remained placid; but there was an ugly glint in his bulbous eyes. "An interesting young man. Yes, yes, yes."

Sanders gave a complicated wriggle of disgust. "Ha!"

"Perhaps a trifle opinionated," Doctor Pettibone continued benignly. "He actually insisted that Bessie Proudfit was not epileptic but hysterical."

Sanders snorted venomously. "Blasted impudence! Just because he spent eight years at the epileptic colony. He told me Bill Patterson wasn't epileptic either; said he was a paretic."

"And did you have a lumbar puncture?" inquired Doctor Pettibone with bland interest.

The other turned redder yet, and ground his teeth. "Ye-ah!" he admitted. "And the darn fool was right."

"Ah!" remarked Doctor Pettibone gently. "Yes, yes, yes." Massaging his large, white hands, he slanted a glance of pity downward at his colleague.

Doctor Sanders started like a shying horse. He clinched hairy fists; his small, black eyes grew keen with suspicion.

"And how about Bessie?" he inquired his usual staccato utterance softened to a malignant purr. "What happened to Bessie? You sent her away, didn't you?"

Once more, the larger physician wiped his tremendous face. Though still pale, it had suddenly become beaded with perspiration. "Ah— uh!" he replied lucidly.

Sanders made a complicated gesture of exasperation. "You big fraud!" he yapped. "She was hysterical; you know it! The 'epileptologist' was right."

The larger man seemed to shrink inwardly. He gave a forlorn, shamefaced nod. "Again!" he admitted.

Both men turned to stare toward the road, and the figure advancing from that direction. "Fool whippersnapper!" they pronounced in perfect unison.

By the roadside stood a small car; a flivver, stripped of body, fenders, windshield; a mere chassis, with one bucket seat. "Swell car for a doctor to drive!" growled Sanders. From this had descended a notable figure of a man, who was now approaching the group.

He was a rather awe-inspiring person; though not much over the average height, his circumference was tremendous. He seemed almost globular, and as he walked he rolled majestically, ponderously; yet he advanced with surprising speed. Presently he stood by Henry Madison's body, eying the two physicians from the opposite side of the fence.

Facing him, Doctor Pettibone appeared almost slight. The newcomer had the healthy fatness of a well-fed baby; he had a baby's face also, tremendously enlarged. His cheeks were round, and pink and white; his eyes were baby blue and guileless. He had an absurd button of a nose, and a tremendously long upper lip, beneath which a wide mouth curved into a disarming smile,

"Good morning, gentlemen," he offered blandly. His voice was high pitched, piping, babyish.

"Good morning, Doctor Strickland," replied Pettibone with bitter courtesy.

"Har!" snorted Sanders.

"I heard that Henry Madison was dead," the newcomer continued ("Must have had your ears pinned back," muttered Sanders, *sotto voce*) "so I thought I'd just come out and see, An interesting case, Henry; mighty nice chap, too."

The other two physicians exchanged a disgusted glance. "Well, well! Let's get to work," urged Sanders. He ignored Doctor Strickland; again the two older physicians leaned over that quiet body. After a rather unnecessarily minute inspection, both straightened. "Satisfied?" asked Sanders; and, "Satisfied," answered Doctor Pettibone.

His soft, blue eyes wide with apparent admiration, Doctor Strickland observed this formality. "And what did he die of, gentlemen?" he asked respectfully.

He received a double stare of unutterable scorn. "Of asphyxia during a convulsion," announced Doctor Pettibone. "Man died in a fit!" barked Sanders. Strickland's innocent-seeming blue eyes drifted from the faces of his colleagues downward, to rest on the quiet form still hanging from the fence. "In a fit," he repeated softly. "In— a— fit. Remarkable!"

This comment the other two ignored. "We'll take him down now," decided Sanders. He glanced around for Peter Brady; but Peter had vanished. From the

distant cow barn came a clanging of milk pails. Sanders glanced at Pettibone, and the two started awkwardly to scramble over the low fence.

"Permit me, gentlemen," piped Doctor Strickland, in the manner of a welltrained servant. He stooped, and, without apparent effort, raised the limp body of the dead man, turned it in the air, and laid it easily upon the grass.

"Died in a fit," he repeated refiectively. "Extraordinary!"

Thus decently laid out, the body was that of a heavily built, black-haired young man, with a square face which must normally have been rather stolid, though now it was purple and distorted. The congested eyes bulged; the tip of a black tongue showed between parted lips. Across the throat lay a deep-cut crease, made by that choking wire. Here the dusky purple of face and upper neck ended with startling abruptness. Below, the skin was dead white.

Sanders and Pettibone had climbed the fence. "I suppose I'd better impanel a jury," offered Sanders, who was coroner. "Get this thing over with."

Doctor Pettibone nodded solemn agreement. Strickland was upon his knees beside the body, examining its neck with curious intentness. Presently he rose, and stepped to the fence, to examine its top wire; then he returned to the dead man.

"Perhaps you could enlighten us, doctor," offered Pettibone with elaborate sarcasm. "We should be delighted to receive your expert opinion."

"I don't know much," replied the fat young man modestly. He lifted the dead man's right arm, and let it drop back with an audible thud. Rising to his feet, Strickland absently patted pocket after pocket. At last, finding what he sought, he extracted a pipe from his vest pocket, not without difficulty. It was a black and odoriferous pipe. In meditative silence, the epileptologist charged this with virulent tobacco, tamping it home with a chubby forefinger. So much accomplished to his liking, he set the pipe-bit between his teeth, and searched himself once more for matches. That black and reeking pipe seemed extraordinarily incongruous in the midst of his wide, baby face.

During all this while Strickland had kept silence. But, when his pipe was lighted, he emitted one vast cloud of blue-black smoke, and drew down his long upper lip and spoke around the pipe stem,

"I don't know much," he piped, "except about epilepsy." And now his voice dropped a full octave, and became deep and assured. "But I do know quite a bit about the epilepsies. Quite— a— bit. And I don't believe this man died in a fit."

"No?" asked Sanders.

"How nice of you to let us know!" drawled Doctor Pettibone with sick malice. "Would you be kind enough to tell us how he did die, then?"

Doctor Strickland's pink-and-white face seemed suddenly to have grown more mature. Fine lines appeared at his eye corners; his wide mouth tightened into a hard line. "Come here, gentlemen," said he gravely. "Take a look at the top wire of this fence."

Reluctantly, the others obeyed; and saw nothing of consequence. "Well, well, well! What of it?" demanded Sanders.

"Woven wire," replied the epileptologist. "With a right-hand twist." He nodded significantly. "Now look here."

He knelt again beside the body of Henry Madison and lifted its chin to show the deep crease beneath. "See those marks?"

"What of that?"

It was a new voice, sharp and insistent. Ralph Madison, who had been standing all this time in the background, absorbed in his own sorrow, had now stepped forward. His hands were clenched; his whole finely muscled frame was tense. His chin was thrust forward, and his large, black eyes held an insistent question.

Doctor Strickland glanced at him inscrutably, and nodded, as who should say: "Here's one man with sense." But he did not answer the question; still addressing himself to the other physicians, he went on dispassionately.

"This man is limp, not rigid; he has no *risus*. He was strangled, without a shadow of doubt; but in a fit? I— think—not."

"Rubbish! Why not *petit mal*?"

"For several reasons," replied Doctor Strickland with assurance. "For one, Henry never had anything but major convulsions; he had no weaknesses, no fainting attacks." He paused deliberately. "Besides—"

"Well, well, well!" Doctor Sanders' whole meager frame twitched with uncontrollable irritation. "What did he die of— since you know so much?"

Strickland puffed at his villainous pipe for several moments. His face was bland as Buddha's, yet the two physicians and Ralph Madison leaned toward him, tense and unwillingly impressed. In his own good time, the fat young man spoke quietly, almost indifferently.

"Strangled, of course; but not in a fit. He was murdered."

"You fool!" exclaimed Sanders disgustedly. "You're crazy! I got too much to do to listen to any more such rubbish. Ralph"— turning to the dead man's cousin— "I wish you'd go up to the house and phone Sheriff Rogers. Ask him to pick up a jury and send them out here."

Ralph Madison stood irresolute. His slender hands opened and closed, his lips twitched. His narrow face was white. He swallowed twice, with a clicking sound, and spoke difficultly: "But— but, if there's any doubt— I mean, if poor

Henry was really murdered— though I don't see how it was possible— we ought to—"

"Rubbish!" Sanders' small, black eyes were red rimmed and furious. "Do as I tell you!"

Ralph Madison turned obediently away. Sanders and Pettibone turned ostentatious backs upon the interloper, Strickland. But the epileptologist seemed content to be ignored. For a time he wandered rather aimlessly about, glancing here and there; once he dropped to his knees to' scrutinize the grass beside the dead man. Then, rising, he began casting about in widening circles, eyes searching the uneven turf.

At last he paused, shaking a dissatisfied head; then he approached the two physicians rather diffidently. By now, Ralph Madison had almost reached the distant barn. The three doctors were alone with the dead man.

"Look here, you fellows," Doctor Strickland began uncertainly. "I know you don't like me much; but I want to play square. You know that a *grand mal* convulsion begins with a tonic stage; continuous muscular contraction." Again his voice deepened authoritatively. "Now, I have watched a number of Madison's fits; and in all of them the tonic stage was much prolonged. Suppose that he had stood here, at the onset of a convulsion. He would have pitched forward, perfectly rigid, not even breathing; he would have been almost suffocated before his clonic twitchings began. Now, if he had fallen against that wire at the onset of his convulsion, between the fit itself and the choking of the wire, he must have died in the fit. That would mean cadaveric spasm; instantaneous post-mortem rigidity. He would have been as stiff as a board, supported only at the neck and by the tips of his toes. Instead, he was limp as a rag; and still is. He can't have been dead more than a couple of hours."

The man's quiet confidence commenced to have its effect. Sanders and Pettibone exchanged an uneasy glance. "I was just thinking—" muttered the latter.

"Of course you know the autopsy findings of death during a convulsion," Strickland went on. The other two nodded rather uncertainly. "Congestion of the nose and throat, pulmonary cedema, acute degenerative changes in the kidney, and so on. Why not do an autopsy? If you find any changes in this man except those due to strangulation, I— I'll never claim to know anything about epilepsy again." Doctor Stickland's face became cherubic.

"Of course, of course!" said Doctor Sanders. "Course I'm going to do an autopsy; meant to all the time."

"Another thing," the epileptologist continued. "That wire has a right-hand twist. Now, look again at the mark on this man's neck."

The other two, impressed in spite of themselves, bent once more above the dead man's discolored throat.

"You see, here in the middle, is the mark of the top wire of that fence; with a right-hand twist. But it's superimposed! Underneath is the mark of another strand— with a left-hand twist. Look here at the sides; see, the marks there are clear— of a three-strand wire with a left-hand twist. Now, look!"

Without visible effort, the epileptologist lifted Madison's limp, heavy body, turned it over, and laid it carefully in its original position. "Now look," he invited them. "The marks on his neck run more than half around it; but this wire only touches his throat."

"Ah— no doubt he twisted about somewhat," offered Doctor Pettibone wisely.

"He must have twisted violently, to have untwisted that wire, and then wound it back into a left-hand twist," suggested Doctor Strickland.

Doctor Pettibone subsided. "Yes, yes, yes," he muttered weakly.

"No, I tell you this man was murdered. Somebody came up behind him, and garroted him with a bit of three-strand wire. It ought not to be hard to trace; there isn't much wire made with a left-hand twist."

Doctor Sanders nodded decisively. His black eyes snapped; he shook an emphatic finger beneath Pettibone's nose. "I thought there was something funny about it all the time," he declared. "And I bet I know who did it, too— that surly, overbearing hired man, Pete Brady!"

Doctor Pettibone looked wise. "Yes, yes, yes. Doubtless."

Doctor Sanders began to hop about excitedly, gesticulating. "Well get him!" he cried. "He thinks he's safe— oh, I put him off in good shape! Now we'll get him; we'll jump him; we'll get a confession right here and now!" Again that emphatic forefinger menaced his bulkier colleague's nose.

"Quite so," agreed Doctor Pettibone with dignity, stepping backward.

The coroner glanced about for further approbation; but the epileptologist had disappeared. He could be heard thrashing about like a mired elephant among the willows which fringed the little creek. The other two physicians did not seem to regret his absence. They exchanged a glance of mutual understanding, and looked toward the cow barn, whence Ralph Madison was now advancing,

The young man came on swiftly, at a half run. As he came nearer, he called out excitedly. "Sheriff's collecting a jury; he'll send them out in about an hour, What have you decided?" Despite the heat, and his exertions, Madison's face bore an odd pallor; it seemed sharper than usual. His black eyes were fierce. "If it's'true that Cousin Henry was murdered, I'm going to— I''ll—" He covered his face, weeping with rage.

Doctor Pettibone laid a fatherly hand upon his quivering shoulder, "There, there, my boy," he soothed, "Don't get excited; just let us see to it. Quite so."

"Huh!" barked the coroner. "I'll attend to it; clear this thing up right away! Just you skip back to the cow barn and fetch Pete Brady."

Ralph Madison gave the two men a questioning stare. "Do you think Did he do it?" he whispered tensely.

"Now, now! Run along," ordered the coroner not unkindly,

Ralph Madison hesitated one more moment. "Where's Doctor Strickland?" he inquired. "Yahr! How do I know? Now, beat it; you hear?" The epileptologist's very name aroused Doctor Sanders' volatile temper.

Madison departed; and when he was out of earshot, the coroner turned to his colleague. "And where the devil is the epileptologist?"

Doctor Pettibone smoothed his pendulous cheeks. "I can't hear him," he stated. "Perhapse he's stuck in the mud."

But even as he spoke, the willows began to shake convulsively; among them appeared the round and beaming face of the epileptologist. It appeared turtlewise from beneath the edge of the bridge, and glanced up and down the long lane. Seeing the two physicians alone beside Madison's body, Strickland emerged ponderously from among the agitated willows, and advanced toward them. He was wet to the hips; from the knees down his trousers were stained with thick, black mud; his shoes were full of water, and squelched moistly with each step. But his face wore a smile of cherubic contentment. He held both hands behind his back. "Well, what's the next step, gentlemen?" he inquired with an air of respectful admiration which caused the coroner to flush angrily.

"Wait and see— wait and see. You'll find out!" barked Doctor Sanders.

The epileptologist sat down tailorwise and fell to restoking that black and villainous pipe which was so oddly incongruous in the midst of his infantile countenance. He seemed to have detached himself from the situation; he had become a spectator, only mildly interested.

Presently Ralph Madison appeared from the direction of the cow barn, followed by the hired man. Ralph walked with nervous haste; but the other lagged reluctantly, and once or twice stopped dead in apparent protest. At last, with an angry gesture, Madison gripped him by an arm and half dragged him onward.

Thus, like captor and captive, they came toward the waiting group.

"Ha!" remarked Doctor Sanders significantly. "Guilty conscience."

On the bridge, Peter Brady had stopped. "I doan want to come any further," he protested. His broad, stupid face was sickly white; his little eyes darted restlessly about, as though seeking an avenue of escape. "I've told them all I know, I tell you!"

Ralph Madison's narrow, handsome face was set and stern. "You come on!" he ordered; and the other, cowed, obeyed sulkily, his little, pale eyes looking everywhere except at the dead man.

"Now, Peter Brady," said Doctor Sanders, "you found Madison here 4 Tell us all about it— and mind you tell the truth!"

Brady shifted his feet clumsily. Beads of perspiration stood on his broad upper lip. He looked at the ground; and the muscles of his wide jaw swelled and relaxed rhythmically. Beside him, like a guard, stood Ralph Madison. His handsome face expressed scornful pity; but his eyes were hard and alert.

"Speak up!"

At the coroner's sharp order, Brady started nervously. "I do' know nothin' about it," he muttered indistinctly. "I b'n cockin' up clover ever since dinner time; you c'n see fer yourself out the further side of the barn. Come five o'clock, when Henry didn't show up, I went to fetch the cows— and I found him"— with a queer, furtive gesture toward the dead man— "a-hangin' there just like you see him."

"You found him!" repeated Doctor Sanders significantly. "Ha! Were you alone?"

"Uh-huh. You don't think this feller'd, help milk, do yuh? He was off som'ers, like he mostly is." Beneath lowered lids he cast a look of scorn at Ralph Madison.

"I was out driving," offered Ralph quietly.

"Alone?" interpolated the epileptologist.

"Alone," returned Ralph.

Coroner Sanders swelled visibly. His lean, wrinkled neck reddened like the wattles of an enraged turkey. He thrust a quivering forefinger right at Brady's face.

"What did you kill him for?" he demanded.

Brady's squat figure quivered convulsively. His face turned livid. Then he straightened, to face his accuser, not without dignity. His little eyes were steady now; and there was a ring of injured innocence in his voice.

"Aw, have sense," he advised. "Fer what w'd I kill him fer? Me and him always got along fine. I'd—"

"Didn't he knock you down yesterday for beating a horse?" asked Ralph Madison sharply.

"Aw, well, what does that amount to?" A curious wave of feeling swept across the broad, stupid face, so that it suddenly became crafty, vicious. "Say, why don't you ask him about this?" A broad splayed thumb indicated Ralph Madison. "If anybody wanted to git rid of poor Henry, if anybody wanted to

choke him with a bit of wire, it would be Ralph, here! Ask him who gets the farm, now! Just you ask him who gets everythin'!"

Brady's heavy face had turned crimson. With lowered head, he faced young Madison, like an angry bull. "Ask him!" he rumbled fiercely. "Ask him where was he when this here happened."

Ralph faced this accusation with white scorn. A quiver ran over his well-knit form; his fists clenched, his lips set ominously. "That's enough from you, Peter," he said. "Of course, doctor, I can prove where I was— if you wish."

"He'd better!" roared Peter Brady. "What is he better than I am, to be left out of this? You murderin'—"

Crack! The sharp impact of a blow; and Brady went down like a pole-axed steer. Ralph Madison stood over him, quivering, his thin face white with murderous fury. "I'll kill him— I'll kill him," he muttered over and over, beneath his breath,

All this while the epileptologist had sat motionless, cross-legged, smiling like Buddha. Now he puffed strongly upon that awful pipe and spoke around its stem:

"Some years ago," he offered with an air of complete detachment, "St. Peter also denied an accusation with cursing and swearing."

Coroner Sanders leaped, like a nervous, fly-stung horse, and turned a harrassed face toward the speaker. "Wish you'd either come in, or stay out," he muttered half audibly. "Fool whippersnapper!"

Doctor Pettibone rubbed large pale hands together. "Ah, yes, yes, yes!" he murmured suavely, "Quite so. And where were you, Mr. Ralph Madison, at the time of this— ah, unfortunate occurrence, if I might ask?"

Ralph Madison began to tremble visibly. His face was disordered with rage; he seemed about to attack his questioner. But he fought bitterly for self-control, and presently achieved a voice.

"I was out driving at three o'clock," he choked.

Whereupon Sanders and Pettibone exchanged a pregnant glance. "Three o'clock; quite so!" vouchsafed Doctor Pettibone. And, "Ha! three o'clock," repeated Sanders and faced Ralph Madison once more.

"How did you know," he demanded intensely, "how did you know this man was killed at three o'clock?"

For an instant young Madison's eyes flashed this way and that. He bit a trembling lip. Then he mastered himself, achieving a frozen calm. "If I am to be accused of this— this hypothetical murder," with a venomous glance at the epileptologist, who received it smiling, "if I am to be accused, I shall stand upon my rights, and refuse to answer."

Peter Brady was now sitting up, holding his head between both calloused hands. There was a look of stupid amazement on his face. But at these words he glanced up slantwise with a sneering grin. "They'll cut yer comb!' he muttered; and threw up a defensive arm.

But Madison ignored him. "How about it?" asked the young man. "Are you going to try to hang this on me?"

Sanders and Pettibone conferred in important whispers. One caught a word here and there: "Opportunity— motive— credit." At last the coroner turned toward his new suspect. "I think—" he began gravely.

But now the epileptologist knocked out the dottel of his pipe against a boot heel. At the little tapping the other four started nervously. Only the dead man lay unmoving, uninterested in revenge or justice.

Doctor Strickland rose ponderously, thereby taking the center of the stage. Standing near the dead man's feet, he faced his audience of four, and began to speak didactically, like a professor to his class. :

"Some one," he stated, "left a horse tied to the fence out there where my so-called car stands. Left a horse hitched there for some time, this afternoon,"

"I knew it— I knew it!" exclaimed the coroner. "Ralph Madison, you're—"

But the epileptologist continued to speak, smothering Sanders' interruption by sheer indifference to it. "On the other hand— But we might as well begin at the beginning."

He paused to make certain that all eyes were upon him; then he brought his right arm out from behind a massive back, and ostentatiously tossed something to the turf beside the dead man's head,

It was a bit of twisted wire, perhaps five feet long; but its two ends had been knotted into loops, so that it had a grotesque resemblance to a shortened skip rope. It twisted as it fell, until it lay across Henry Madison's discolored throat, almost upon that sinister crease.

For a space, no word was said, Doctor Sanders was apoplectic; Doctor Pettibone wore a look of dignified pain. Just beyond them, Peter Brady and Ralph Madison stood side by side, their animosity forgotten. Both were white of face, and tense; Ralph's proud eyes were steady upon the dead man's face. His sensitive lips quivered with repulsion. "Was that how it was done?" he whispered. "With that— from behind?"

But Peter Brady stood with bowed head. A curious vibration began in his wide-set legs, and grew and spread over his body until he shook as with ague. His little eyes jerked here and there; but he did not glance at that bit of wire.

"It was really clever," declared the epileptologist in a tone of mild admiration. "It took brains. Why, if Henry hadn't been so limp— or if the tonic stage of his seizures had been less prolonged— I'd never have seen it myself.

"What happened was this: Some one stepped up behind poor Henry, whipped this bit of wire around his neck, holding it by these loops at the ends, set a knee between his shoulders, and quietly garroted him. When the poor devil was dead, this person laid him face down over the fence, being careful to fit the top wire into the mark of his garrote, I don't suppose he ever noticed that one wire had a right-hand twist and the other a left-hand twist."

"Took brains— of course! Ralph did it. Said so all the time!" ejaculated Coroner Sanders defiantly.

Peter Brady's trembling moderated, and he cast at the other a glance of venom. But Ralph Madison only held his handsome head the higher and gazed at his accuser with eyes of luminous scorn.

"I am inclined to think so myself," granted the epileptologist seriously. "But, I fancy we can check up." He paused for a moment, and the tension became almost unbearable. Two physicians leaned forward with narrowed eyes.

Only the epileptologist remained unmoved. He paused to restoke and relight his atrocious pipe, and at last spoke very calmly, through a cloud of noisome vapor.

"For all of his epilepsy, Henry Madison was a strong man. It must have required a good deal of force to strangle him; and those wire loops are not padded. Did you wear gloves on this drive you took?" he asked young Madison.

"No!" The monosyllable came boldly enough; but Ralph seemed to flinch a little, and glanced dubiously at the backs of his slender well-kept hands.

"Very good," pursued the epileptologist; and again his high-pitched voice dropped to that deep, assured tone. "The man who murdered Henry Madison must carry the marks to prove it. His hands were cut by those wire loops —cut almost as deep as poor Henry's neck!"

Suddenly dominant, calmly terrible despite his rotundity, Doctor Strickland moved forward to the fence and faced the two who stood upon its farther side. "Ralph Madison— Peter Brady! Let me see the palms of your hands— both of you!"

An instant's breathless pause; then both men began slowly to obey. Out came Ralph Madisons' slender hands; up came the gnarled and hairy hands of Peter Brady— palms down.

"Turn them over!"

With an effort, Ralph Madison obeyed; but his eyes were not upon the epileptologist's face. Peter Brady's trembling had increased; and now he retched convulsively. His shaking hands began to move; and then, abruptly, with the speed and ferocity of a wild beast, he struck at Madison, who was nearest, and whirled to flee.

The epileptologist set a pudgy hand upon the fence post, and vaulted cleanly over, despite his bulk. But he was not needed, As a hawk upon the swiftflying heron, so Ralph Madison leaped upon the fugitive. A brief, convulsive struggle; a whirl of arms and legs; then Peter Brady lay upon his back, helpless. His captor knelt upon him, both hands buried fiercely in that short, thick neck.

"Murdering hound!" he sobbed thickly. "I'll kill you— like you killed him!"

"Take it easy, son," advised the epileptologist gently; and gripped the avenger's wrists. Yet it was difficult, even for his vast strength, to break that steely grip.

His fingers once loosed, Ralph Madison submitted docilely while the other lifted him from his victim. His face was sick and white with spent passion; his eyes were vacant. Presently he sat down, and began to weep bitterly.

Peter Brady lay supine, semiconscious. His broad, calloused palms were outspread; and across each, just above the root of the thumb, ran a deep, red, corrugated indentation.

The epileptologist stooped briefly. "Wire marks," he announced. "With a left-hand twist."

Peter Brady sat up, and looked confusedly about. He put a fumbling hand to his throat. Then his little, redrimmed eyes turned sick and hopeless.

"You got me," he admitted. "I done it— Well, anyways" — with a flash of vulpine ferocity— "Henry Madison won't beat me up no more!"

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3: The Girl of Rio

Fred MacIsaac

1882-1940

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THE GAMING SALONS of Rio de Janeiro rival those of Monte Carlo, and the Excelsior Club was one of the most colorful. It was there that John Warren Littleton, late of Boston, had his first unforgetable glimpse of life,

One of the things about Americans which is most puzzling to the Latins is our interest in our neighbor's business. Because those of us who do not approve of horse racing, gambling and drinking rum, very slightly outnumber those who do, we have ruthlessly cut off the minority from their more or less innocent diversions.

In South America, majorities rule politically, unless the minority is better armed, but the idea of using the ballot for social reform is repugnant. Making laws to prohibit his neighbor from amusing himself according to his fancy strikes Mr. Latin as unwarranted interference with personal liberty. Besides, it's too much work.

And so the Excelsior flourishes in Rio de Janeiro.

Do you know Rio? Nature and man have combined to make it exquisite pictorially. The indigo of the sky, the purple of the jagged, saw-toothed hills, the turquoise of the bay, dotted with emerald isles, the snowy whiteness of the city, everything glittering in the warm light of the tropics! What good are words to describe such things?

The United States Shipping Board was running large, dry, empty passenger steamers down there at the time, despite the passionate press agent from whom I clipped the above description.

"See Naples and die," some traveler once said. Don't do it. Wait until you see Rio. It makes Naples look like an Italian banana compared to a West Indian one.

John Warren Littleton was a Bostonian. His great-grandfather got rich running slaves from Africa, through the cordon of British cruisers to the West Indies, where they were in demand. His grandfather was killed fighting to abolish slavery in the South. His father increased the family fortune by getting in on the ground floor in Calumet and Hecla, and twenty years later lost it all in copper mines recommended by a Wall Street expert.

John's father had resigned from all the best clubs, and John knew that all he needed to get into them was money enough to pay the dues and initiation fees.

Because the family just at present didn't have money enough to buy polish for the ornate brass knocker on the front door of their brick house on Beacon

Street, John Warren Littleton took a job which brought him to Rio de Janeiro, to work in the office of the American company which ran the electric railways.

Rio was not then famous for good hotels. The Republica was considered the best, yet its dining room was not very inviting. When John drifted in for breakfast he was not pleased at the outlook, but his interest was excited when the waiter handed him a letter with the fly-specked bill of fare. Although he knew no one in Rio, he was not as surprised as he might have been to find that the letter contained an engraved card, putting him up at a club:

Mr. John Warren Littleton
has been extended the courtesies of the
EXCELSIOR CLUB
during his stay in Rio Janeiro.
Sponsors: Dom Pedro Cavaliero, Dom Santo Benezo.

Undoubtedly some good Brazilians who had enjoyed his father's hospitality, at one time or another, he explained to himself and decided to avail himself of the privilege as soon as possible.

During the day, Mr. Littleton got acquainted with the office force of the American Street Railway Company. There were two agreeable youths named Sullivan and Mahoney who hailed from Boston, but as they were not the sort of people with whom he mingled at home, Littleton did not feel it necessary to become chummy with them immediately, particularly with a card from the Excelsior Club in his pocket. Neither did SuJlivan nor Mahoney appear to yearn to receive him to their bosoms.

He spent the late afternoon and early evening in strolling about the broad streets of Rio. He was surprised to discover a very splendid library, with an enormous number of books in Spanish, French, Portuguese, English and German, equipped with all the latest appliances.

John visited a reading room as imposing as Bates Hall in the Boston Public Library, and secured a book from the stacks in much less time than it takes to get similar service in Boston.

AFTER a comfortable dinner, alone, at a French café, which he had found by accident, he summoned a taxi, which was a big touring car with a taximeter attachment, and which charged up a very moderate amount, considering the high cost of most things in the Brazilian capital, to convey him to the portals of the Excelsior Club.

The Excelsior was a large, impressivelooking building, with a huge electric sign across its chest, telling its name in three-foot letters. John passed through

an elaborate entrance, handed his hat to a man in livery, who 'brought him a check, and followed a footman up a broad staircase to the second floor.

"Evidently some special occasion," he thought, as he heard a steady hum, as of a great many people in conversation. At the top of the stairs he received a surprise. Instead of a few conventional clubrooms, he entered the first of a series of huge salons, richly furnished in the gold and red of Louis Quinze. This room, and two others that he could see beyond, were full of people, most of the men in evening attire, and all the women in extreme décolleté.

In the center of the room, forty or fifty people were grouped around a long green table, and John heard a rattle and whir and chinkle, which meant gaming on a large scale.

Littleton was an intelligent youth, well educated and pretty decent, if he did impress people as a bit of a snob. He had often read about the tables of Monte Carlo, and it didn't need more than a few seconds to convince him that the Excelsior was a ibig gaming establishment of a similar character. He had never heard that Rio permitted such institutions, nevertheless the nature of this place was obvious.

His New England conscience suggested that he turn right around and march down those broad stairs, but his love of excitement persuaded him to remain and get acquainted with a form of entertainment he knew nothing about, particularly since he was present through no will of his own.

There was something in the atmosphere which went to his head, a tenseness, a thrill, a current thrown off by the emotions of those who risked their money at the tables.

John had never seen roulette, *chemin de fer*, or *trente et quarante* in operation, and he peered at the tables in each room, wondering which was which, and too shy and unfamiliar with the various Latin tongues, which were in use around the tables, to ask questions.

One or two Brazilian ladies, in opulent gowns, turned large, dark orbs upon him invitingly, but John was too interested by the gaming operations to notice them.

From the rear salon, large French windows opened into a pretty garden, where tables were set at the edge of graveled walks, and numerous couples were seated or walking about.

Beyond was a brilliantly lighted pavilion, which appeared to be a music hall, for John could see, through open windows, a stage with actors on it, and an audience in its seats. Like an intrepid explorer, he passed into the garden, ignoring a softly whispered invitation from a gentleman seated at a table alone.

An orchestra was playing an alluring Spanish dance tune, as John purchased a ticket from a much frizzed mulatto woman in the box office, handed, the check to the doorkeeper, and was ushered' into the theater.

The interior was curiously arranged to American eyes, comparatively limited space for orchestra seats, and much ground railed off into squares, each containing tables and chairs. A balcony was devoted entirely to boxes, where decorative ladies in evening clothes were drinking with Brazilians of every variety of mustache and whiskers.

THE entertainment was a variety show, but different from American types, in that all the turns were singing and dancing numbers, and the performers were all women.

A billowy Brazilian girl sang a single verse of a popular waltz song and vanished. She was followed by a beefy Spanish woman, who offered undulating dances for two or three minutes, only to vanish in her turn. A pair of French women, no longer young, sang a Parisian music-hall ditty, with much rolling of eyes, and then passed on their way.

John happened to glance up at the balcony to his right and was surprised to see the Brazilian song bird and the Spanish dancer occupying a box with three bearded persons who were opening wine. Rather disgusted at the obvious character of the place and the poor quality of the show, John was reaching for his hat when the sound of English struck his ears.

The stage had been invaded by a slim, dark girl, winsome in appearance, prettily and modestly gowned, who was singing an American ragtime song. It was a recent product of "Tin Pan Alley," but it sounded rather pleasant, so far from home, after the mixture of foreign tongues which John had 'been hearing all the evening.

He noticed that the girl's voice was quite ordinary, and she sang with little animation and a complete absence of the pep that ragtime requires to conceal its flimsy musical structure. In a few minutes her number was over, and, like all her predecessors, she received no encore.

A Spanish girl in toreador costume tripped forth to sing about successful killing of bulls. This time John threaded his way out of the music hall and stepped into the garden, which was cool, quiet and inviting. Spying a vacant table, he dropped into a chair and pressed the button which summoned the waiter.

At that moment the girl who had been singing ragtime, still in her stage costume, came down the pathway from the stage entrance. In front of Littleton she was met by a very swarthy Brazilian, with the mustache of a brigand.

"Listen, miss," he exclaimed in excellent English. "Three gentlemen have sent back requests for your company, and you walk out of the theater. What do you mean? Why do I pay you? For your singing? Bah, you can't sing. March right back. One of the gentlemen looks like a coffee planter from San Paolo. Do you want to ruin this club?"

"I can pick and choose, can't I?" demanded the girl sullenly. "Well, I pass up your coffee planter. I came out to meet this gentleman. Good evening, Dom Pedro."

Saying which, she dropped into the chair opposite John Littleton and gave him a strained and meaning smile.

Dom Pedro leered with obvious relief. "Certainly, my dear miss. I am glad to have you choose the most attractive guests. Good evening, sir. My most charming artiste."

With a deep bow he walked rapidly away.

"The nasty old snake," remarked John's visitor. "Say, it was lucky I spotted you, just when he caught me trying to disappear. You're an American, aren't you?"

"I'm from Boston."

"Well, never mind. There are worse places. You don't mind sitting here and talking to me for a few minutes, do you?"

"I am not accustomed—" began John rather frostily.

"Say, for the love of Pete, don't turn me down. Can't you recognize a self-respecting girl when you see her?"

John looked squarely at her for the first time. He had been too alarmed and embarrassed to do so before. He saw two honest gray eyes peering out from under their heavilv painted lids, and the rouge on her face couldn't disguise a strong, courageous little chin.

"I beg your pardon," he said simply. "What can I do for you?"

"How long have you been in Rio?"

"Twenty-four hours."

"Don't know the ropes at all. That's too bad."

"Why?"

"I want to get away from here."

"Then permit me to be your escort."

"Listen, kid. You don't know anything about this burg at all, do you? We can't walk out of here as though it was a Boston hotel."

"Why not?"

"Because this is the roughest town in the world, believe me. This place is nothing but a huge gambling joint, and Rio is full of them. The gamblers own

the town. It looks easy enough to walk out of here, but they'd have me back quicker than a wink, and I don't know what they'd do to you."

"May I ask what you are doing here?"

"Well, I'm up against a game I never played before, but I'm going to beat it semehow."

"But what are you doing so far from— er— Forty-second Street?"

"I'm a vaudeville performer, single act. I was playing small time up home, but my work didn't go very good, and I was having a hard time getting engagements. One day I saw an ad in the paper that read something like this:

"Wanted: American vaudeville artists to tour South America. Season's work guaranteed, traveling expenses advanced, excellent salaries to the right parties.'

"I went right to it. I didn't know anything about South America, but a job was a job, and advanced traveling expenses sounded good, the way my pocketbook felt when I lifted it. The agent was a smooth one, all right. He showed me a first-cabin ticket for Rio and a ten-month contract, at three times what I ever made in the States. I came along with a couple of other girls who did vaudeville specialties. They shipped them right up to San Paolo."

"And then things went wrong, did they?"

"Just let me tell you. Dom Pedro met me at the dock. He was most dreadfully polite, told me that I would have all Rio at my feet, and landed me out here quicker'n a cat can wag his tail. "After I had been given a room and taken a glance around the place, I tumbled to a lot, and decided that I had better pull my freight. Accordingly I called for Dom Pedro and told him that I thought Brazil didn't need any of my talents, and I wanted to go right back home.

"Then. I found out what I was up against. I owed him for the trip down, most two hundred dollars, and I didn't have a dollar and a half in my pocketbook. Dom Pedro said he'd have me put in jail for debt, if I didn't stay here and work out my bill. He could have done it, too. My salary was a hundred dollars a week, but they charge me forty for room and board. Talk about New York prices! And they have a system of fines, in case you don't behave properly to the guests in the music hall, which keeps me broke. Besides, there are the tables, and every time I risk a dollar, hoping to win enough to settle my indebtedness and leave, I lose it. Anyway, I don't think they would let me go if I paid them. That's just the hold they get on us."

"Why are they so anxious to keep you? Aren't there plenty of performers who could be engaged without compulsion?"

The girl looked him firmly in the eye and lowered her voice. "The vaudeville part of the job is just to keep the audience entertained for a time. The idea is

to meet the patrons of the place, persuade them to buy wine, and lead them to the gaming tables. They agree to allow me a fifty-per-cent commission on the wine and gambling bills of those men I persuade to part with their money. Now, I ask you, ain't this a fix for an American working girl to be in, who has traveled all over the U.S.A., without meeting anything worse than a stagedoor John?"

"Why, it's an outrage. I'll communi"cate with the authorities and get you out in a jiffy."

"What authorities?"

"The police."

The girl rejected the suggestion scornfully. "This ain't the U.S.A.," she explained, as though she were talking to a child. "This is Rio. If you go inside you will find the chief of police at the second table on the left. This joint can't be pulled. It's legal. The Brazilians can't see anything wrong with the arrangements here. They like'them. They would laugh at you and tell you I was pulling a grand-stand play to attract your interest. You ain't the first man I asked to get me out of this hole. The others thought I was kidding them."

"Well, I can go to the American minister."

"That might work, but by the time he got here they would have me spirited up to San Paolo or some other interior point."

"Then what are we to do?"

The girl smiled gratefully. It was an honest and very sweet smile. John felt himself thinking of her more protectingly at once.

"It's nice of you to say 'we,' " she said. "Makes me feel as though I wasn't alone any more. Now, if I could get out of here and reach the American minister's house, myself, he would have to protect me. The thing is to get out."

"Just get your hat and coat," said John aggressively.

"Wait a minute. We'll have to watch our chance. Meantime, I'll have to lead you to the tables. Got any money?"

"A little— not much."

"A little American money looks like more when you change it into milreis," said the girl. "If you don't play a little, they will call me away and make me talk to somebody else."

PILOTED by the girl, John went to the cashier and changed fifty American dollars into one hundred and fifty thousand reis. The huge figures on the bills he received impressed John, as it does every other visitor to Brazil.

It seemed that Brazil started with the same coinage system as the United States, both basing their units upon a thousand mills. But in America we call a thousand mills a dollar, while in Brazil they named the one thousandth of a

dollar a rei, and called a dollar a thousand reis. Gradually the value of Brazilian money has depreciated, until at the present time the Brazilian thousand reis is worth only sixteen cents in our money.

John knew this, but it was rather startling just the same to own one hundred and fifty thousand of any kind of money.

"What's your name, may I ask?" he demanded, as they moved slowly through the throng toward a huge, green table, where roulette was the attraction.

"Dora Dever," she replied. "What's yours?"

"John Warren Littleton."

The girl made a little grimace, as the syllables rolled forth, but fortunately John didn't see her.

"Tell me," he asked, "is this game on the level?"

"The roulette has to be, more or less, when there is a big crowd playing. They get a fairly big percentage here, they are not molested by the police, and they want you to come back, so they give you a run for your money."

John had never seen a roulette outfit, and he had only vague ideas of how to play. Dora explained the thirty-six numbers, alternately red and black.

"They tell me that you are paid thirty-six times your stake, if you win at Monte Carlo. Here you get only thirty-four. The bank's percentage in Monte Carlo is the thirty-seventh square, called zero. Here they have zero and double zero. Therefore, when you put a coin on a number, the odds are thirty-seven to one against you, and if you win you are only paid thirty-four. With a percentage like that the game doesn't have to be crooked."

"I should say not. What number would you suggest?"

"Forget the numbers— play red or black or odd and even. Here the odds against you are only twenty to eighteen. You have a chance."

Following her advice, John dropped thirty thousand reis on the black— ten dollars in our money.

The croupier released the marble which sped around the bowl and finally settled into twenty-four.

Only those who have stood before the green table and won their first bet can appreciate the thrill which shot through the Puritan from Boston. The croupier pushed three bank notes toward John, who tossed them upon his stake, still lying on the black.

Again the ball rolled. No. 2, a black number won. Again a roll of tattered bills— Brazilian currency is usually in a ragged condition— was pushed toward John.

"Take your money," warned the girl. "Don't overplay your luck."

"Now, what will I do?"

"Wait until either red or black comes up twice in succession, and play the other color. If you lose, double your stake on the same color."

DORA'S was a good system, perhaps the best system devised to beat roulette, but it has ruined thousands who follow it persistently. Her theory was that red, having come up twice, was not so likely to come up three times. If it did, it was less likely to come up four times. If it did, it was almost certain not to turn up five times.

Unfortunately for her system, the statisticians who study the tables at Monte Carlo, year in and year out, can show you that black has occurred thirty-two times in succession, while red has turned up thirty-six times consecutively. Since neither John nor Dora was aware of this, they played confidently and successfully.

An hour rolled by, and the pack of tattered bank notes in front of John grew to formidable proportions. Dora helped herself, again and again, and lost, but luck finally perched on her shoulder, also. Their faces were red, their eyes burned and glittered. Dame Fortune had caused them to forget that the girl wished to escape from this gilded prison, and the man intended to accomplish it for her.

Other players had not been so lucky, and the crowd around the table was gradually thinning out. A few professional gamblers were boldly plunging on Littleton's luck. Seeing the success he was having. they played the black and the red when he did.

The croupier turned uneasy glances toward him, and a gray-bearded manager hovered about uncomfortably. The bank was now losing heavily with each bet made by Littleton, for there were no win ings from unfortunate players to offset the gains made by the American.

Dora, whose knowledge of the character of the institution caused her to keep her eyes open, saw the gray-whiskered one nod imperceptibly toward the croupier. Curiously enough, the ball immediately fell into a red hole and a package of notes placed on the black by Littleton and Dora and their followers was raked avidly in by the bank.

"Time to quit, kid," she murmured.

"Not yet," replied Littleton, the lust of conquest on him.

Dora dared not argue with him, since it was her business to encourage him to play, but with the sharp point of her French slipper she kicked him neatly in the ankle.

The pain caused him to start, glance sharply at the girl, and remember their project.

"Enough for to-night," he exclaimed aloud and gathered up the profusion of currency which lay in front of him. He stuffed his pockets until he bulged like a scarecrow, and still he wasn't able to pack it all away.

Dora also had won, though not so heavily. She disposed of her winnings by the simple process of stuffing them into the bosom of her evening gown.

"Let us go to the supper room. You can change that money into bills of larger denomination at the cashier's. Pardon me—"

She broke off because she had seen the gray-bearded manager beckon from across the room. While John was changing his money, Dora interviewed the manager.

She returned smiling, took Littleton by the arm, and led him downstairs into a very dainty supper room.

"How much did you win, kid?" she asked, as they seated themselves at a snowy table.

"Hundreds and hundreds of thousands of these reis things, but I don't know how much in real money. I think it is in the neighborhood of a thousand dollars."

"Well, take a good look at it while you've got it. I was given my instructions that time I left you. The manager said to see that you bought wine and drank it, and then returned to the tables. They want that thousand back."

"Not from me," declared Littleton. "I know when I am well off."

"There would be nothing to it if you went back. They would see that nobody played at your table, and the croupier would do funny things to that little ball of his. I told you the game was more or less on the level. This time it will be less so."

"Then we shall have to make our getaway now."

"How?"

"I was looking around when I came downstairs and noted the arrangements at the front door."

"There are two porters, a doorkeeper, and a hat-check man at the door," said Dora. "I have sized that exit up often. No chance. You couldn't handle four of them."

"No," replied John; "but suppose I were to go out with you and pass on about fifty thousand of this funny money to each one of them— do you think we could get away?"

The girl's eyes gleamed with excitement. "I bet we could. These fellows would murder their grandmothers for that much money."

"Where are your wraps?"

"Top floor, in my room. I won't go after them. The night is so warm I won't need them. If there is an automobile outside, and we can get away quick, we might make it. But would you spend all that money just to get me away?"

"If it hadn't been for you I wouldn't have it at all," he declared.

THE waiter had by this time set cold chicken and thin glasses of yellow sparkling wine before them. John lifted his glass and gazed over it at his companion.

"Here's to our unconventional acquaintance and a happy ending," he toasted.

Dora touched her lips to the wine, but regarded him tenderly. She was a very charming vision with her flushed cheeks, bright gray eyes and snowy neck and shoulders.

"Here's to the most perfect gentleman I ever met."

John had often shuddered at the phrase, "a perfect gentleman," as he heard it in street cars and restaurants of Boston. Coming from Dora, it sounded to him like an accolade. The fizzing wine sent pleasant shivers through him. He began to thrill with excitement.

"Now, for our plan of campaign. We start to walk out the front door. If nobody stops us, well and good. If the porter tries to hold us up, I slip him a bundle of bills. While he is counting it, we'll jump into a taxi and be on our way. If two or three interfere, I'll shell out other big green rolls. I don't think we'll have any trouble."

"But suppose we do?"

"Then we'll force our way out. How about a window?"

"Every last one of them is barred. They want to know who enters and who leaves."

"Then there is nothing for it but the front door."

"And suppose there isn't a taxi outside?"

"Of course there must be. There was a string of them when I came in."

John pushed back his chair, and Dora did likewise.

"Don't show any excitement," he warned, as they strolled slowly out of the supper room which was on the ground floor and opened into the front hall.

"Did you check anything?" asked th girl.

"Just my straw hat."

"Get it. A bareheaded man will attract more attention than a woman without a hat."

John stopped at the check room, presented a brass disk, and received his hat. With Dora on his arm, he moved nonchalantly toward the front door. Just as it seemed as if he would make it unquestioned, a huge mulatto porter

appeared in front of him. He spoke volubly in Portuguese. John made to push by him, but a big yellow hand was laid on his chest. ,

"Slip the money to him quick, kid," warned Dora. "He'll have a crowd in a second."

John winked portentously at the colored man and offered him a whole handful of the tattered Brazilian bank notes. With a wide grin the porter grasped the imposing-looking bribe, stepped aside, and they were out in the velvet, tropic night.

A carriage starter bowed to them respectfully.

"Taxi, senhor?"

"*Si! Si!*" exclaimed the girl.

A large red touring car, looking foolish with a taximeter perched upon its windshield, drew up at the curb.

THE starter opened the door with a bow, Dora stepped in, and that instant there was an uproar in the club hallway. The mulatto porter rushed onto the sidewalk, followed by a waiter and the gray-whiskered manager and Dom Pedro himself.

A shrieking and chattering in Portuguese rent the air. The starter, galvanized by what he heard, exclaimed:

"*Non— non— non*!" and made signs for Dora to alight.

The necessity of action almost paralyzed John for a second. He didn't know what to do.

"Quick, kid, quick!" exclaimed Dora. "They're after us."

Forgetting the bribery plan, John suddenly shot out his right fist and caught the starter on the point of the jaw. The man swung completely around and flopped on the sidewalk. The young American leaped into the car, and at the same second Dora thrust her hand into her bosom, drew forth a handful of loot, and forced it upon the amazed chauffeur, screaming at him:

"*Andamo— vamos*! *Pronto— pronto*!"

The red car leaped forward just in time to avoid the rush of attachés from the Excelsior.

Those Rio Janeiro chauffeurs deserve a chapter to themselves. They are either Indian or mulatto or both. They are born with the speed mania. They operate automobiles as though they feared to live. This particular specimen attained forty miles an hour in ten seconds, in another ten he was doing sixty. Down the main avenue he darted and, swinging around by the Munroe Palace, turned into the ocean-front boulevard, where seven or eight miles of perfect road and no speed regulations stretched away before him.

A violent jounce of the car caused Dora to be hurled against John, and without volition his arm closed around her. She snuggled against him, with a sigh of content.

"Gee! You certainly are a wonderful feller," she declared.

Whether it was the excitement or the wine, or the rush of cool wind past his ears, John did not notice the language in which the sentiment was couched, but he did appreciate its meaning.

"It wasn't anything. We had practically no trouble," John declared in his most casual manner. "Why, I thought we'd have a real fight getting you out."

Suddenly from far behind them came a sharp report. At almost the same instant there was a loud bang, apparently right under them. The chauffeur jammed down his brakes, and the car stopped within a few yards.

"Good Lord! They fired at us and hit a tire," exclaimed John. '"We're not out of the woods yet."

The chauffeur had leaped from his seat and gone to look at one of his rear tires. A second shot rang out and then a third. The chauffeur crossed the street in one bound, leaped a low fence, and disappeared in the shrubbery of somebody's garden. He did value -his life.

The rapid approach of another auto could be heard.

"Oh, I've got to go back," exclaimed Dora in a whisper. "Beat it, kid, the way the chauffeur did. I'm all they want. You get the American minister to-morrow."

"They won't get you back," declared John rather impotently. "I won't let them have you."

"But they've got guns, and you haven't a thing."

The conversation was shut off by the arrival of the pursuing car. Two men in evening dress, carrying gleaming revolvers, alighted. They were Dom Pedro and the manager of the gambling rooms.

"Senhor," said Dom Pedro suavely, "vou have abused our hospitality. You win vast sums of our money, and you steal our most charming artiste. The money is yours, and we have nothing against you, but the lady—"

"This girl is an American citizen, and she is not going back to your club," declared John. "You don't dare shoot an American citizen on a public thoroughfare of Rio Janeiro, and you'll have to do it to get Miss Dora."

Dom Pedro grinned with amusement.

"We do not shoot anybody, my young friend. We fire the revolvers to blow up the tires and stop the automobile. That is all. While our servants hold you tight, we remove this young lady. It is no trouble. *Hola*! Manuel, José, Pedro!"

From the car came the chauffeur and two club attendants. John looked wildly around for a weapon, and his eye rested upon the crank of the auto lying in the bottom of the tonneau.

AS he straightened up with the rod of steel in his hand, he saw the headlights of an auto rapidly approaching from the opposite direction.

His opponents saw it also and began talking together.

"When this car comes fairly near, Dora, yell as loud as you can. If they're human, they'll stop at a woman's scream."

Dora gripped his hand, as a signal she understood.

When the car was a hundred feet away she emitted the most blood-curdling yell that the Bay of Rio de Janeiro had ever been asked to echo.

It worked like magic. The approaching car hastily stopped, and three or four men piled out.

"What's the trouble here?" "What's up?" "Who's dead?" came a chorus of inquiries in English. John recognized, with a burst of joy, that the nocturnal tourists were Sullivan, Mahoney and others from his own office.

"American girl being kidnaped," he cried. "Hurry up, you fellows. I'm Littleton of the Electric Company."

The newcomers surrounded the red car and peered interestedly at Dora. "Pretty good work for your first day in Rio," remarked Sullivan. "Who would you like murdered?"

Dom Pedro bustled forward, his revolver now reposing in his hip pocket.

"Senhor Sullivan, I implore you," he exclaimed. "Reason with this compatriot of yours. You are an old patron of our establishment, and you know that this young woman should go back with us. Didn't we pay her expenses from America and offer her every advantage an artiste could desire?"

"Young lady," asked Mr. Sullivan, "want to go back to the Excelsior?"'

"Not on your life!" exclaimed Dora. "They'll have to kill me first."

"And me!" declared John fervently.

"Dom Pedro," began Mr. Sullivan rather floridly, "my heart bleeds for you. This young lady doesn't want to go back, and, as she is an American, what she says goes with us. If she owes you any money, we shall see that it is paid to you; but if you want her, you will have to beat up several of your very best patrons."

"Mr. Sullivan," declared Dom Pedro, with equal politeness, "if you make a point of it, of course we shall permit the girl to go. What she owes us is nothing. I would not offend any American in Rio. As for the girl, she was not suited to our needs. Let her go."

Whereupon the gamblers marched with great dignity to their car and in a few seconds were whirling down the road. The chauffeur of the red car now appeared mysteriously and began making vociferous demands.

"Wants to know who's going to pay him for the ruined tire," translated Mr. Sullivan.

"Tell him to take it out of the wad I gave him," suggested Dora airily. Her spirits had soared with her escape, and she was as buoyant and impudent as she probably was wont to be on Broadway.

"Well," remarked Mr. Sullivan to Mr. Mahoney, "guess they don't need us any longer. It's lucky we hove in sight, though; you didn't have a dog's chance with those guys if they got you alone."

"I appreciate most deeply what you did for us most," said Littleton. "Can you tell us what to do now? This young lady escaped with nothing but the clothes she is wearing, and she doesn't know anyody in the city. Where can I take her until she decides what she wants to do?"

"Better take her to your own hotel for the remainder of the night, and put her under the protection of the manager. In the morning the young lady can purchase a new outfit, buy a ticket for New York, or do anything else she desires, except venture alone anywhere near the Excelsior Club."

"Are they likely to try to kidnap her?"

"I don't think so, but I wouldn't answer for her safety if she puts herself into their clutches."

"Don't you lose any sleep over that," exclaimed Dora. "If Dom Pedro ever sees me again, it'll be with one of those telescopes you look through at the moon."

The young engineers laughed heartily, climbed into their car, and departed. Dora and John prodded the chauffeur of their crimson chariot and made him understand the Hotel Republica was their goal. He began to replace the tire.

A very matter-of-fact clerk expressed no surprise whatever at the rather disheveled appearance of a heavily rouged lady, without wraps, assigned her a room, and she departed, promising to meet Littleton at breakfast. He then called the manager and Littleton explained the situation.

WHEN he reached his room, Littleton spread out on the bed the bundles of currency which he drew from all his pockets. After the copious bribing in which he had indulged, he did not expect to find a very imposing total, but the figures on the bills astounded him, even though he knew that one thousand meant only thirty cents in real money. The total was over six thousand milreis, which reduced to our money amounted to over one thousand dollars, a very pleasant profit for an exciting evening.

Littleton presently slept peacefully and profoundly, and before he knew it the porter was pounding on his door, informing him that it was time to get up. As he shaved, John thought rather uncom fortably of Dora. He remembered the thick rouge of the music hall, the blackened brows and eyelids, and the evening gown in which she had accompanied him on their wild ride. He remembered also the embrace in the taxi, and his arm tingled agreeably at the remembrance. He wondered how Dora had interpreted that, and what as a gentleman he was expected to do.

Rather self-consciously he entered the dining room and cast his eye rapidly over the dozen guests in search of her.

"Expecting me to wear my war paint to breakfast?" asked a pleasant female voice, directly in front of him.

There, smiling demurely, was a totally different Dora from the one he had been expecting. She wore a trim white morning costume, as modest as it was neat. Not a vestige of rouge or pencil was visible upon a sweet and saucy countenance.

Those gray eyes, whose honesty had convinced him through their disguise the night before, were exceedingly potent now, and John suddenly became embarrassed. as he dropped into the chair opposite this entirely unknown young person.

"Confess, now, you laid awake half the night wondering how you were going to get rid of the awful music-hall girl you were entangled with," said Dora, as she sipped her coffee and gazed roguishly at him over the rim of the cup.

"Where did you get the clothes?" he asked, preferring not to answer her.

"Why, I found that I had over six hundred dollars left of my winnings last night, and I sent half of it up to the Excelsior early this morning, with the request that they accept it in payment of my debts and send down my luggage. It was here in an hour, with a polite note from that scoundrel Dom Pedro."

"Say, you don't even talk the way you did last night," said Littleton who was devouring his charming companion with his eves.

"Never use slang before lunch," she declared. "A girl in the show business has to speak two languages, English and Broadway; take your choice."

John, whose Boston upbringing had caused him to wince when he thought of the expressions she had used the night before, beamed like a June morning.

Dora smiled understandingly.

"May I ask, what are your plans?" he inquired gravely.

"Sure. There's a boat for New York in ten days. I have money enough to go back second cabin and to live here at this hotel until sailing time."

"And when you get to New York?"

"Go back to work. If I can't find anything in the show business, I'll work in a restaurant or a laundry, but no more foreign travel for mine."

"And you will let me see you every day until sailing time?"

"My boy, you're elected. You are the only man I know in Rio, and if you show any inclination I won't say you nay."

THERE isn't much more to tell. Below the equator things happen quickly. Given a pretty girl and an attractive young man, propinquity and a tropical moon, and there is nothing to it.

Dora was an actress and a woman. Discovering that her Broadwayisms jarred the sensitive plant, she laid them away in lavender and was careful to speak the language of Boston. Of course she was not perfect in it, for no one brought up in New York can ever speak "Bostonese" perfectly.

John found her more adorable every moment and waited the sailing day, with more and more alarm. The night before they were walking on the sea front, where royal palms nodded in the soft and velvet breeze from the wonderful bay. The arc lights and the touring cars which darted up and down the wonderful boulevard were all that suggested Northern ways.

John, who a few weeks before, would never have considered any place as home which was not located within sight of the gilded dome of the Massachusetts Statehouse, found himself pouring into willing ears a plea that they live in a pretty bungalow in beautiful Brazil.

And Dora, who had earned her own living long enough to have no illusions about a career, just slipped, her hand in his and leaned her head on his shoulder. And their housekeeping fund was the loot from the Excelsior Club.

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4: The Sergius Stones

H. Bedford-Jones

1887-1949

Everybodys Magazine, June 1926

STANDING on the Pont Alexandre III, with the electric glories of the Paris exposition all about him and the Eiffel tower scintillating in the night sky above, Jim Lewis uttered the historic words:

"I've broken my watch crystal. Where can I find a jeweler?"

To put it mildly, Jim Lewis was confused. He spoke excellent French but had been in France only two days, though three war-years had been spent here. How he came to be on this bridge toward midnight, Jim was not certain. A young lady's engagement had been celebrated by a party at one of the pavilions, and Jim, drawing the consolation prize of an invitation, made the most of it. He was not particularly sorrowful, but thought he was, so he drowned sorrow very successfully. And now— here he stood, addressing an agent of the police, while a throng of men were listening and laughing.

"*Jai cassé le verre de ma montre—"*

The agent grinned. One of the men in the group uttered a laugh. Two other men strolling along past the shops of the bridge halted and then made their way closer to the American.

It was indubitably true that Jim Lewis had broken the crystal of his wrist-watch. How it had been broken, he could not say. But he was unaware that he had uttered a classic slang phrase, not at all used in good society. When a Paris gamin slips on a wet street and sits down hard, his companions burst into gleeful song— "Look at Jean! Look at Jean! He's broken the glass of his watch— "

The two men who had strolled up together, exchanged a low word. Then they approached the agent and Jim Lewis. They were not smiling, and even seemed a trifle annoyed. One spoke to the agent, low-voiced.

"Our friend forgets himself— one has sampled the good wine of France too generously, perhaps! Well, we'll take care of him."

The agent nodded, well-pleased. It was part of his job to assist convivial diners on their way home, and he was not sorry to shift it to other shoulders. The second man took Jim Lewis by the arm.

"So here you are! We've been looking for you. Come along and we'll find the jeweler."

"Fine," said Jim with gratitude. 'Nothing like having friends, is there? Friends always turn up, even in Paris. Lead the way, friend, and I'm with you—"

One man took his arm on either side, and the three started for the right bank.

"This is terrible!" said the man on the right, with something like a groan.

"Yes, sir, it is," agreed Jim earnestly. "Here I only got to Paris yesterday, or the day before, and find my girl engaged. That's terrible enough."

"No wonder he never showed up," said the man on the left. ''He's been drunk all the time." He shook Jim's arm. "You're a fool!"

"I know it," admitted Jim cheerfully. "Nobody knows it better, partner."

"You were half an hour late for the appointment, and at the wrong place on the bridge."

"Thass all right," and Jim's assent was vague but hearty. "Lucky to be there at all, if you ask me! Anybody who's broken the crystal of his watch is out of luck. I broke it. You can see for yourself."

"It's lucky you turned up," said the other. "We've booked passage for you on the noon plane to London. Fits in very well that there's no examination of air passengers' luggage, eh?"

"I don't wanna go to London," said Jim, catching the salient point of all this. "I got a month to see Europe in, and I don't like fogs."

"That's all right," said his companion soothingly. "You get to bed and clear out your head. You'll have to be up early— we'll get you out to Le Bourget by eleven-thirty. No use talking to you now, though. Come along and forget your troubles. It passes understanding why they should have sent an irresponsible man like you, but that's not our affair."

"They sent me because I was a good man to send," stated Jim positively.

"Very likely. But you should not have been drunk all this time."

"I was not drunk, and I'm not drunk now," declared Jim. 'I'm just a little bit mixed up after all those toasts. And I'm supposed to meet a man in Paris, too— that's why— they sent me over. Got to see him the next day or two— 'portant affair. You see, it concerns a new principle in bridge-building—"

He was silenced by a sudden glare of light. They had left an exit, and in the street before them stood an automobile, its lights flashing on and off. The second good Samaritan came to them, took Jim by the other arm, and he was bundled into the car, stumblingly. The others followed, and the car rolled away almost in silence.

The two men spoke together in low voices, in a strange language. One lighted a French cigaret, and the fumes were stifling, in the closed car. They just about finished Jim Lewis, so that he had only a vague memory of what followed. A marvelously pretty girl was in it somewhere. but he could not recall just where...

Jim Lewis waked with a perfectly clear recollection of his meeting the two friends and of what had happened up to his getting into the car. One vagary of

good wine is the clearcut memories and equally clear-cut oblivions it leaves behind.

He sat up, saw a tray on the table beside his bed, and investigated. There was no icewater, but there were coffee and rolls and butter, and he piled into them at once. While eating, he investigated his surroundings. The room was rather ornately furnished in heavy French style, and very comfortable. On a chaise-lounge were laid out garments—not his own, but new and neatly folded. Silk underwear, silk shirt, a very handsome tweed suit, and a small traveling bag. On a table near it were his own belongings— passport, money, jewelry.

"Gosh!" said Jim Lewis, staring. Next moment he heard voices, and saw his door was slightly ajar. A girl's voice, bringing vague memories of the previous night.

"Certainly I'll know him, if he's the man! We must make certain."

"By all means," another voice, silky, smooth. A man's voice, this. "The name is not the right name. On the other hand, the man had the password. It was not at all sure what name he would use, owing to difficulties in securing a passport. You will recognize him?"

"Of course. I know every one of them, and if he is the right man he'll recognize me. Wait here and listen. He'll call me by name if he's met me in America, or I'll know him again."

The door was quietly opened, and a girl slipped into the room. She was quite the most ravishing girl Jim Lewis had ever seen, but he was given no chance to appraise her. She gave him one look, made a gesture of caution, then came forward and held out a slip of paper on which were scribbled two words. With an effort, he answered the appeal in her eyes.

"Jenny Gardner!" he exclaimed. "How's the young lady? You remember me?"

Relief, swift and inexpressible, flooded in the blue eyes. A little laugh bubbled on her lips, a the girl seated herself on the bed beside

"So you're using the name of James Lewis, eh?" she exclaimed. "Naturally, we were mixed up over it."

"So was I," Jim responded with heartfelt meaning.

She made him a gesture of caution, rose, and went to the door. She stood there for a moment, talking with the man outside. Jim Lewis caught only snatches— "get him here with the stones... time to lose... Le Bourget by eleven-thirty..."

What a beauty! Half a roll forgotten in his hand, Jim Lewis stared at her as she stood there. Few other men would have thought her beautiful, but Jim Lewis had his own notions as to what made beauty; he usually steered clear of

the china-doll type. Civil engineering, city planning, and other odd jobs had perhaps taught him that handsome is as handsome does, or the lesson might have come from observing the contrary.

AT ALL events, Lewis had come to France to make money and see sights, and having just lost one object of adoration, was in no mood to have his head turned by anything wearing skirts unless it were exceptional. This one, he assured himself, was highly exceptional. She might not have a face to make a painter rave, but she had the sort of personality that reaches out and hits— the sort of girl whose absence is felt even more than her presence.

"I'll play her game anyhow," thought Lewis, "and see what comes of it. Why did she have that paper ready with her name on it. Because she saw me get here last night, of course. But as for the rest of it— gosh! I'd better eat."

He did so. Jenny Gardner left the door, closed it, and came back quickly to the bed, her dark blue eyes dancing eagerly. She spoke softly, rapidly.

"Are you game? Hurry up, no time to explain!"

"You bet," said Lewis promptly. "If I'm on your side."

"You are, you tousel-headed angel! If—"

"If I'm an angel, you're what would tempt any angel to fall," said Lewis. 'I don't wonder the angels weren't satisfied with heaven—"

"Stop it!" she exclaimed, irritated yet laughing frankly at him. "You landed on the twentieth at Cherbourg, according to your passport— therefore you were on the one-cabin *Lancastria*. Did you see anything of another man on that boat, about your build, named Watson?"

"I did, Sherlock," said Lewis. "He's in the Cherbourg hospital with a fractured skull. I took him there and sent word to the consulate. He was hit by—"

The girl caught her breath sharply.

"Oh! Then we can do it after all! Your name in America was Watson, remember that, if any one on the inside gets talking about it. Say you were told to forget everything else. Refuse to talk— claim you are here to take orders and nothing else. Play it safe, get me? And don't recognize me on the plane unless I speak to you first. Can do?"

"You bet. But I want to know—"

"It isn't what you want but what you get." Jenny Gardner moved to the door, put her hand on the knob, flashed him one serious, earnest look. "And you'll get plenty if they suspect one thing wrong! Plenty Watch your step."

With this she was gone.

Jim Lewis shook his head and went on with his slender breakfast. It had just vanished when the door opened again. A man came into the room, crossed to

another, murmured a good morning in French, and Lewis heard water splashing in a tub.

"Your bath will be ready immediately, monsieur," said the man, a sleek individual.

"Got a valet, have I?" thought Lewis, and left his bed. He went to the window and looked out. He was on the third floor above a narrow street, walled by apartment buildings. He could see the blue street-sign on the corner building opposite— Rue Jasmin. This, he recollected, was a very short, aristocratic street in Auteuil. He turned and looked at the clothes laid out for him, and whistled.

"Hm! Purple and fine linen all right, and monogrammed. Looks like Greek, so it must be Russian. And that chap last night was named Cyril. What's Jenny Gardner doing with a lot of Russians in Paris? They're bad medicine, by all accounts."

He went in to his bath.

Lewis did as he was told, and kept his mouth shut, knowing better than to try pumping the valet, whom he dismissed. Shaved and bathed, dressed in his luxurious raiment, he lighted a fat, loose cigaret from a box on the table, and reflected. He had nothing to worry about. He was alone in Paris, his belongings would be kept at his hotel until he could send word, and the touch of mystery in this affair fascinated him.

He could see how it had all come about, yet he wondered at the vagary of fate. Pure chance had led him to a maudlin search on the previous night, had brought to his lips a password or catch-phrase predetermined upon by these Russians. The man who had come from America to meet them, lay in the hospital, safely out of the way. What was it all about then? Stones, jewels of some kind—was this a gang of thieves?

Opening the handbag, Lewis found it packed with clothes, and nearly full. There were also some English magazines and a toilet-kit, a handsome one. His broken wrist-watch had been replaced by one of gold. Lewis was surprised to find it long past ten o'clock.

THE door opened and the valet appeared.

"If monsieur will descend to the little salon? Count Gregory is here, and awaits monsieur below."

Lewis nodded and followed his guide. The "descent" was a matter of only a few steps, to a long corridor on which hung heavily framed portraits; he passed to the rear of the apartment, really the front. The valet threw open the door of a small salon, furnished with gilt chairs and knickknacks. Two men were seated here. One was smooth-shaven, sleek, the Cyril of the previous evening. The

other was magnificently bearded, a gray veteran, who rose and bowed as Cyril performed the introductions.

"This is our friend from America, at present known as M. Lewis. It is he who handles the affair for us."

"Good," said Count Gregory. Despite his leonine appearance, the man did not appeal to Jim Lewis, who had no great use for European nobility in general. From his pockets, the count now produced six portfolios of soft brown leather, and handed them to Lewis.

"I brought them into France in the same way," he said, "I believe they fit?"

The obvious thing was to try. They were too large for ordinary pockets, and with a shrug Lewis tried one on an inside pocket. To his astonishment, it slipped in— a perfect fit. The suit had been specially made to receive them.

"Excellent!" approved Cyril, leaning forward. "Now, the other pockets—"

He indicated them, and Lewis found two in his waistcoat, two more in his coat.

"One in the light overcoat," said Cyril.

It was plain enough— a smuggling game. Lewis frowned slightly— did these six leather books hold jewels, then?

"The method is safe?" he said inquiringly. Cyril spread his hands and shrugged.

"Why not? There is no customs examination of baggage by the air line to London, just as there is none in France— when the passenger is an American tourist. At New York, there is no personal examination except on the big boats. Cabin-boat passengers are not examined unless the douane there has reason to suspect them. There is no reason to suspect you. You go from London, not from the continent. You go on a small steamer, with a crowd of other cheap fares— excellent!"'

Count Gregory rose and held out his hand to Lewis.

"They are in your keeping, comrade. luck!"

"Same to you," said Lewis. The count took his hat and stick, and left. Cyril saw him off, then came back to his guest.

"We had better be off. I have a taxicab waiting. A private car would be too noticeable at Le Bourget— we are not dealing with fools, I assure you! At Croyden, however, Bantoff will meet you with his car. I've already wired him the name you're using, so he'll not mistake you. Everything at London will be in Bantoff's hands, of course. Mlle. Gardner will go over with you and advise Bantoff, being thoroughly familiar with steamship lines and so forth, but she'll not recognize you while enroute. Now, then, is everything clear?"

"Quite, thank you," said Lewis, and prayed for absolution from the lie. The only clear thing was that he must ask no questions but play the game blindly.

"Good. I'll not go out farther than the gates with you." Cyril jerked a bell-pull and the valet appeared. "Our things. Bring down the bag to the car."

Two minutes later, Jim Lewis slipped into a: light overcoat, in whose breast pocket the sixth leather case fitted perfectly, took hat and stick, and followed Cyril down to:the street while the valet brought his grip. An ordinary Renault taxi was waiting, but no orders were given the driver. He took the bag beside him, closed the door, and set off for the Place de la Concorde at a speedy gait.

Paris sped past. Once the Madeleine lay behind, they threaded traffic interminably as they made for Le Bourget. Neither man spoke. Presently the Ceinture loomed above, and the Paris gate lay ahead. When the taxi halted, Cyril held out his hand.

"Well, good luck! We'll arrange everything on this side; the other side becomes your affair. Tell Meyers to cable us the moment all's safe at New York."

Jim Lewis nodded. Cyril got out. The chauffeur came back with his return ticket, and the two stood talking for a moment. Then Cyril departed and the taxicab moved on.

One thing was clear— nobody was being trusted with these leather packets. The chauffeur was keeping an eye on the bearer, as far as the aerodrome, and from there to Croydon it was Jenny Gardner's job.

"Looks to me like a smuggling operation," thought Lewis cheerfully. "However, I should worry! Wonder what Mr. Watson in Cherbourg is thinking about just now? Evidently he's not thinking, or he'd have wired this crowd where he was."

Half-way out from the gate to the aerodrome, a tire exploded. The chauffeur cursed and drew in to the curb, and fell to work. What with traffic delays, time had passed, and when at length they went on again, and the low hangars hove in sight on the left, it was eleven thirty-five.

As Lewis alighted, a hurrying figure called to him.

"English or French line, sir?"

"Blessed if I know," said Lewis. "English line, I think."

"Oh, you're Mr. Lewis? Your ticket is waiting for you here. Come along— the others have gone to the passport office. This your grip?"

Lewis found himself hurried along the graveled path to the office of the English air line. His grip was weighed, his passport was taken, he signed the book and then followed his guide again to the passport office. A number of machines were warming up, the huge glittering Handley-Page making a silvery contrast with the yellow-brown French machines and army planes.

"Your ticket, sir, and lunch— it was arranged by telephone," said his guide.

Lewis took the box handed him, and found himself joining a group of tourists ranged along the customs benches. Jenny Gardner was there, but did not glance at him. The customs man asked for his grip, checked a mark on it, and the doors were opened.

Lewis felt a hand grip his arm, and turned.

A SMALL-BUILT man, with yellow mustache, boyish features, and a cheerful twinkle in his eye, had paused to catch Lewis by the arm. He was clad in heavy flying togs.

"Beg your pardon," he said, "but your face looked deuced familiar— oh, I say! Lewis!"

"Orley! You blessed little Britisher— how are you!"

The two gripped hands.

"You're a fine sort of chap," exclaimed the pilot. "Why didn't you look a fellow up? I haven't seen you— why, it's seven years since we took that little header over the lines together, isn't it?"

"Just about that," assented Lewis, grinning. "And blamed if you don't look just as much like a pink-cheeked baby as ever! Still flying, are you?"

"London bus— you're not going with us? You are? I say, hurrah!" Orley clapped Lewis violently between the shoulders. "Fine! We'll have a chin-chin. All alone?"

Lewis nodded. "Yes. So you're in the merchant trade now, eh? Where's old John Higgs?"

The little man sobered. "Crashed last Christmas. Left Croydon, caught fire, lost his head and turned— ended him. Didn't you read about it?"

"No," said Lewis. "Whose fault?"

Orley shrugged. "White-washed, of course; pretty nasty business, for the good of the service as usual. Come along— I'm a bit late. Sit up with me?"

"If I may, sure!" Lewis accompanied the little pilot out to the great concrete square where the silver machine stood. "Against the rules?"

"They're made to be broken." Orley grinned. "We don't carry any mechanician this short run, so come ahead. Look here, you'll come home with me the other side?"

"Can't do it,' said Lewis with regret. "Chap's going to meet me and rush me along. Let's have dinner tonight in London. You're not married?"

"Was once— free now. Never again. Right. We'll meet tonight. Been in these busses?"

"No. They're new to me. Haven't been in the air for five years."

"Follow on, then."

They came to the machine, in which the other passengers were filling. Then came. a hitch. A man ran up to the director, and another followed from the passport office. Orley was called over to consult. Another passenger had just come, hoping to get a place at the last minute, but all places were filled. Jim Lewis saw him coming out, with a small grip— a tall, thin man, with black-rimmed spectacles and a very hard jaw. He came up to the group, and displayed a document of some sort.

"If you can fix it, do it," he said curtly. "I want to go by this plane, sure."

"That's all right.' spoke up Orley, scanning the passenger-sheet. "Give him number six. I'm taking Mr. Lewis in front with me."

"Oh, you are!" said the field director. "Where's his written permission?"

Orley chuckled. "In the War Office archives. He and I were together in the big push. Suit you?"

"All clear, old chap. Right! Here you are, Mr.—what's the name? Matthews."

Matthews went up the landing steps into the machine. Orley followed, beckoning Jim Lewis, and the latter ducked his head to enter the square door.

"Lock it behind you, will you, Lewis?" said the pilot. "Top and bottom."

Lewis obeyed, then worked forward between the double row of seats. He caught one sharp, penetrating glance from the man Matthews. He caught a look of surprise from Jenny Gardner, and winked in return. Then, in the front end, he crawled through the tiny door and adjusted himself to the crowded space beside the pilot.

The engines roared, dropped, droned, roared again. Orley adjusted his radio head-set, tested his engines, watched his gauges, and waved his hand. The rattling roar of the twin engines rose to a thunder-roll— and they were bumping out across the green field. In twenty seconds more the machine lifted and soared.

"Good wind," said Orley. "Two hours forty minutes today. Time us."

Two hours and forty minutes it was, of monotonously steady roaring along at three thousand feet, sunshine above and a nearly solid bank of clouds below for three-fourths of the way. Only when the Channel was half-cleared did the clouds below break.

THE two men in front, so unexpectedly met from the old days, talked in snatches. Jim Lewis had wanted long ago to forget all about the air service, but now found himself thrust back into the old atmosphere at a leap. Friends were discussed, living and dead, one or two men he knew were still on the airways, but no more.

"I may be coming back to Paris tomorrow some time, if I can make it," said Lewis, when the green fields of England were below them. "Any chance of coming with you?"

"Hard to say," returned Orley. "I think a special will be going over early in the afternoon, to pick up a couple of Air Ministry officials. That means it'll go over empty. I'll put ina request for it, and can tell you tonight. Eh?"

"Good work."

At two thirty-five Orley banked for the Croydon field. Five minutes later they were at rest on the cement platform, and the passengers were filing out. The last to alight, Lewis found them already straggling over to the customs shed, and followed with Orley. Half-way to the shed, they were met by a customs inspector, with whom Matthews was talking earnestly.

"You know this gentleman?" the inspector asked the pilot. Orley chortled.

"I should hope so! He brought down two Huns the same night I got crocked up."

The inspector saluted Lewis with obvious respect. "Sorry, sir. We have information some game's going on, and want to assure ourselves in regard to various passengers—"'

Conscious of the scrutiny of Matthews, Jim Lewis got out his own card-case.

"Here's my card, inspector. I'm a civil engineer, over here on business. My firm has a London agent— the address is there. He'll know me, and can identify me if my passport doesn't serve. I have one grip; I suppose it's with the others there. Nothing dutiable, I think."

"Quite all right, sir— sorry to have bothered you."

They went on, followed more slowly by Matthews and the inspector. Orley gave his companion a glance.

"Know what's up?"

"No," said Lewis, with truth. "Do you?"

The pilot nodded. ''More or less. See you tonight, then. Where and when?"

"Suit yourself. Simpson's, Gatti's—"

"Too much style. Say, the Cock at seven. Right?"

"You bet."

Orley passed on, greeting another pilot, and Jim Lewis joined the group along the shed. He pointed out his bag, opened it, and noted it was glanced through. The luggage of the women passengers was not opened, that of the men was inspected. Matthews stood to one side with a puzzled expression on his face, and Lewis guessed he was some sort of agent, perhaps detective.

No personal examination was made. Following Jenny Gardner, Lewis went into the passport bureau, made out his forgotten landing card, and went on through to the waiting cars. One of the field managers came to him.

"Mr. Lewis? This way— a car's waiting for you."

Lewis got his bag and followed. He noted that Matthews trailed along, instead of going to the waiting bus with the others. A smart Daimler limousine stood to one side, and the chauffeur saluted Lewis. The car was empty.

"Mr. Lewis, sir? Right."

Lewis, mindful of Matthews behind, gave the man a wink.

"Mr. Carruthers sent you? Good. Go first to number four, Whitehall Court, where I'll leave my bag, and then to Samson House."

Carruthers was the London agent of Jim Lewis' engineering firm, his offices in Samson House. The chauffeur saluted stolidly and took his bag.

"Very good, sir."

Leaving Matthews to draw his own conclusion, Lewis got into the limousine, which at once started off, whirred along the rectangular drive, and out into the road. Once there, Lewis seized the speaking tube. He hesitated briefly.

A twofold problem faced him. He had no intention of meeting the man Bantoff, who would be to all intents a guard over him until he left England for home. On the other hand, he dared not put Matthews on his trail knowing instinctively that Matthews would at once look him up at Samson House, and if anything were wrong would cut him down like a withered weed. Then there was Jenny Gardner.

"Why didn't Mr. Bantoff come?" said Lewis in the tube. The chauffeur leaned to his end.

"He thought it best not, sir."

"Right, too— there was a detective looking me over. I barely got clear."

"I saw him, sir."

"Then you'd better look sharp, for he's after us in a Rolls," said Lewis. 'You can't hope to throw him off, for he took down our number. If you take me direct to Bantoff, he'll know something's wrong. As it is, I can kill his suspicions. Go right to the Whitehall Court hotel, leave my bag, then take me to Samson House."

"And then, sir?"

"Then," said Lewis, "go on to Bantoff, tell him he is under suspicion, and must not meet me at once. Tell him to have Miss Gardner meet me tonight at seven-thirty, at the Cock, with instructions. Meantime, I'll see this detective, Matthews, and take care of him. Throw him off the trail now, if you can, and

let him find me again at Samson House— I'll play him along and satisfy him as to who I am."

"Right," said the chauffeur, and stepped on the gas.

LEWIS leaned back with a sigh of relief— his one fear had been lest the chauffeur, who was certainly here to keep watch on him, would disbelieve his story about Matthews following. Evidently, the man was more concerned about this fact than about letting Jim Lewis go free, choosing the lesser of two evils. The Daimler gathered speed and thundered down the narrow English road to the turn at Wallington, then struck for London.

By the time they reached Victoria, Lewis was certain that, if any one had followed, the scent was far lost; the chauffeur knew his business, and doubled like a hare, took chances with constables, went through traffic with uncanny daring. This circuitous going took time, however. Despite speed, it was threethirty when they drew up before the fourth block of the Whitehall Court hotels.

"Take in the bag and leave it," said Lewis. "Say I'll be along later on."

The chauffeur nodded. He was a dark man, not an Englishman despite his fluent speech. After leaving the grip, he came out and opened the car door.

"Where is Samson House, sir?"

Lewis gave the address, in High Holborn.

Five minutes afterward, they were in the Trafalgar Square traffic and heading up for Samson House, an inconspicuous and old-fashioned office building housing well-established firms of kindred business. Lewis alighted.

"No mistake, now?"

"The Cock at seven-thirty, sir."

With a nod, Jim Lewis passed into the building.

Mounting the dark and dusty stairs, Lewis came presently to the representative offices of his firm. He walked in, and gave his card to a girl at a desk. Then he turned, and saw Matthews, waiting.

Lewis nodded in recognition, and Matthews stood up, smiling. Before either could speak, Carruthers came hastily into the reception room.

"Ha, Lewis!" he exclaimed. "Glad to see you— heard you were coming over to Paris, but didn't look for you here. How are you? Good trip? Any business on hand?"

Lewis shook hands, laughing. "Nothing particular. I'm trying to meet that French bridge-building chap, Courtray. Missed him in Paris and ran over to see if he had come to you with his plans and contract."

"Here? No— but I had a letter from him. Come along inside—"

"Can't do it." Lewis gestured to the waiting Matthews, maliciously. "Mr. Matthews here is waiting for me, and we're hopping right along. I'm going back to Paris tomorrow, I hope. Do you know where Courtray is, then?"

"Somewhere near Paris— wait! I'll get you his letter. It has his address. Why the devil are you in such a rush?"

"Personal affairs. Got to meet a lady later, if you want to know!"

Carruthers threw up his hands and fled. Lewis grinned at the detective, who nodded slightly to him. In a moment Carruthers was back with the letter, and Lewis pocketed it.

In five minutes, Lewis and Matthews were descending the stairs. Neither spoke until they were in the street, when Lewis held up his hands to a cruising taxicab. Matthews got in without a word, and Lewis ordered the chautffeur to the Savoy.

"We can talk there. Closing hours are on and we can't get a drink, anyhow."

Matthews nodded silently. He seemed perplexed, calculating, ill at ease.

Reaching the Savoy, they entered the lounge and settled down by a smoking-stand. Lewis produced cigarets, and Matthews accepted.

"I suppose," said Matthews, "you want an explanation."

"Right," said Lewis, playing his role coolly. "For some reason you seem to be after me. If you are, come across and I'll do my best to clear things up. What is it?

Matthews threw back his head and laughed, but his amusement passed into a wry grimace.

"It's a bit of bad luck for me, that's about all," he said frankly. "I was on the trail of a crook, and thought you might be my man. You're not. Will you accept my apologies?"

"Nonsense!"' exclaimed Lewis heartily. "Don't mention it. You're a detective?"

"No," said Matthews, and reached for his pocketbook. He drew out a card and presented it. "Newspaper man and a big story— and I've fallen down hard on it."

Lewis looked at the card, saw that Matthews represented an American news syndicate, and nodded thoughtfully.

"First time I've been taken for a crook, but no harm done," he said. "If you want to know my plans for tonight and tomorrow, you can have 'em. I expect to meet a lady, and I don't want to be dodging sleuths—"

Matthews made a wearily irritated gesture of negation.

"Forget it, forget it, Lewis," he said. "Sorry I pulled such a boner as to get after you. You answered the general description, that's all."

"Mind telling me what it's all about? Or is it a secret?"

"Some of it's not. You've read about the Sergius jewels?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Prince Sergius had a world-famous collection of unset stones. He was jugged and shot by the reds in Russia, and his whole family were wiped out, too. It seems the jewels were walled up in his house—secret compartment stuff. Lately the Soviet people discovered them. It's been in all the papers.

"Well," and Matthews leaned over to knock the ash from his cigaret, "'my Leningrad correspondent sent word they were going to ship the collection to Paris and sell it on the curb jewel market, like they did the crown jewels. 'Then he got wind of something better— they were going to get the stuff into America, for the sake of the higher prices. Somebody was coming over from there to get the stones and smuggle 'em in. The customs people were tipped off and they're on the lookout, too. That's all we know. I've been keeping my eye on the boys in Paris and could have sworn I saw you coming out of Krenin's house this morning."

"Krenin? Who's he?" demanded Lewis, frowning.

"One of the propagandists in Paris. Several of those Russians have apartments in the Rue Jasmin— they all have money to burn. Cyril Krenin is about the most unprincipled scoundrel in Paris, and that's saying a good deal; a dangerous rascal to fool with, too. Well, there's the story, and I've bungled it." Matthews rose, hand extended. 'If you'll forgive me, I'll run along and not bother you."

Lewis shook hands and dropped back into his cushioned seat, as the newspaper man took his departure. Cyril Krenin— that was his Cyril, of course. H'm! Well, he had an excellent line on the whole affair, now, thanks to Matthews! And all the while those jewels had been in his pockets, within two feet of the correspondent!

Had they, though? Lewis lighted another cigaret and frowned. He knew better than to open up one of those leathern packets here, yet o far he had not set eyes on the stones. And there were several puzzling factors. The stones had apparently been entrusted to him on very slight premises; either this group of reds would not dare trust any written authority, or they were astonishingly sure of the messenger from America.

"A good deal more behind it that I don't know," concluded Jim Lewis. '"There's Jenny Gardner, too— I'll have to find out where she stands. And who could be after the stones if the owner and his whole family were wiped out? It's no crime to plan smuggling; thev'd wait and catch the smuggler in the act, rather than forestall him."

He glanced at his watch— it was after five. He had left his grip at Whitchall Court as a blind, since he could not hope to get a room at the group of hotels

unless he were a member of the clubs they served. Rising, he crossed to the desk and asked for a room, and found he could get nothing at the moment.

"I can give you one at six o'clock, sir," said the clerk.

"Good." returned Lewis. "And send over to Number Four, Whitehall Court, for my grip— name of Lewis. I'll be back after dinner. Assign me the room and send up my grip, will you?"

Assured that all would be arranged, he turned away. A bellboy was at his elbow.

"Mr. Lewis, sir? A note for you—"

Surprised, Lewis took the envelope from the extended tray and tore it open. He found a brief note:

"If you'll come to Room 401 at once you will learn of something to your advantage."

Lewis frowned at the missive— was this black magic? The one person who knew of his presence in the hotel was Matthews, and Matthews had departed. Or was Jenny Gardner in this? Had she managed to trace him here? He turned to the desk and displayed the note.

"Who has this room, please?"

"An American gentleman, sir— a Mr. Harrison."

It was bewildering. Here every provision had been made for secrecy, yet all the world seemed to know what he was about! Well, why not? The temptation to discard the summons yielded to curiosity. Lewis turned to the boy, who was waiting.

"Did some one point me out to you?"

"Yes, sir, a moment ago. A small man, rather dark. An Hamerican, sir."

"Oh, an Hamerican, eh? Lead the way, then."

Obviously not his recent chauffeur. Complications were increasing, thought Lewis as he followed to the elevator.

The boy conducted him to room 401, received his shilling, touched his cap and departed as Lewis knocked. A voice bade him enter. He threw open the door and saw an ordinary hotel bedroom, with a man sitting at the table before him— a smallish man, a complete stranger, with a rather oily smile as he rose and gestured.

"Come in, come in! You're Mr. Lewis? Glad to see you. Harrison's my name— Ezra Harrison of Chicago and points east. I want a word with you about the advertising matter."

"Eh?"

Jim Lewis came forward a pace, but left the door open behind him. 'What advertising matter?"

"Why, the cold cream, of course!" said Harrison brusquely. "We're not putting down fifty thousand in advertising without some—"

Lewis laughed, as his bewilderment passed into comprehension.

"Oh! I guess you've got me wrong," he said. "James E. Lewis— I''m a civil engineer, not an advertising man."

Harrison blinked at him, mouth agape.

"That so? Confound that bell-hop!"

"Look here— didn't you point me out to him, though?" exclaimed Lewis, at a sudden recollection. 'Looks like your mistake after all—"

"No, yours,'' said a third voice from behind, and the door closed. "Put 'em up."

Jim Lewis turned, to see Matthews behind him, standing there against the door, a pistol covering him.

"And keep 'em up," said Harrison. "Good work, old hoss! He walked into it fine."

HANDS in air, Lewis stared at Matthews, who smiled grimly at him.

"Why the pistol? What does all this mean, anyhow?"

"It means I'm not the fool you took me for," and Matthews chuckled enjoyably. "Bulging pockets in a new suit— you shouldn't sit down in that costume of yours! Shows up the lines abit. Come along and shell out."

"Shell out what?" demanded Lewis, thinking fast. He doubted very strongly whether the other would dare a shot in such a place.

"The stones, you fool!" Matthews snarled suddenly, and the changed look in his face was illuminating. "Want us to croak you? We want 'em and we'll get 'em. Get those hands higher! that's right. Come along, Oily, and frisk him."

"Newspaper man, are you?" said Lewis, on whom a light had broken. "I don't think!"

Harrison, who seemed to deserve his nickname of Oily, moved around. He directed a smirk at Matthews.

"So that's the lay, is it? Newspaper man! Well, you look the part, Silk, I will admit—"

"Stow the gab and frisk this book!" snapped Matthews angrily.

Harrison obeyed. He came to the side of Lewis, who still wore his light overcoat, and patted the inner breast pockets.

"Fine!" he exclaimed with a wheezy breath. "He's loaded—"

Excitedly, he stepped in front of Lewis, reaching with both hands.

It was the moment to act, and Jim Lewis seized it, being confident Matthews would not use the automatic pistol in the hotel. Clear enough now that he had been very neatly trapped by these two— clear, also, that they

were not connected with the press in the least, but were probably connected with less reputable lines of endeavor. They were good actors, however— and played their roles to perfection.

Lewis had his hands in the air. Over the head of Harrison, the man Matthews was glaring into his eyes. So Lewis, as the little man came in front of him and grabbed at his pockets, quietly shifted weight to his left foot and brought up his right knee— hard.

It was a merciless blow, that deadly stomach punch. Oily Harrison never knew what hit him. A frightful gasp burst from his lips, and he flew backward, doubled up, and rammed full tilt into Matthews, driving the latter back against the door. Matthews shoved the gasping, clutching figure violently aside, but was too late, for Jim Lewis fell upon him joyously. The pistol was knocked to the floor, unfired.

It was no time for niceties, as Lewis discovered when murderous fingers barely missed his right eye and scratched across his cheek.

"All right," he grunted. "If— you want it—"

Mr. Matthews was a fighter of rare ability, no doubt about that, but his ability waned after Lewis gave him the knee and slashed him across the Adam's apple. Panting frantic, desperate oaths, he lunged forward and landed a heavy right and left to the ribs and then got in a clean smash that seemed to jar half Lewis' face loose. There he exposed himself, however, and received two lightning-swift, choppy blows across the nape of the neck, at the base of the skull. His black-rimmed spectacles flew off, he staggered, and abruptly went down in a heap.

"Whew!" said Jim Lewis, panting, as he surveyed the ruins. "You sure are a bird. Detective, journalist, crook and what-not! If I hadn't hit you first and hard, you'd have finished me. Feels like you've spoiled my map, anyhow."

Harrison was quite unconscious. Lewis got gome towels, tied up the little man, emptied his pockets on the bed, and rolled him underneath it. Then he repeated the process on Matthews, who was half-conscious but paralyzed by the two final blows. Having more respect for this antagonist, he placed him in a chair and tied him to it.

The necessary accomplished, Jim Lewis went to the mirror and inspected himself. His lips were cut and bleeding, his cheek was scratched, and his ribs were sore; Matthews had landed hard where he did land. For five minutes Lewis bathed his face, then decided his teeth were all sound and the damage was negligible. He came back to the bed, sat down, and began to go through his loot, first pocketing the fallen pistol.

There was little to repay him, except a telegram sent from Le Bourget, addressed to Harrison. It read:

"*Leaving 'noon plane. Meet you Savoy four to five. SILK*."

Two American passports were made out in the names of J. B. Harrison and Homer Matthews, both men hailing from Chicago. The passports were of the old-fashioned, grayish type, and had been renewed in Paris six months previously, indicating that both men had been on this side of the water for some time. Jim Lewis shoved them and the loose money to one side, got out a cigaret, and surveyed his captive in the chair. Matthews was staring at him with returning cognizance.

"No wonder you looked uneasy when I brought you to the Savoy!" he said, and chuckled. "You weren't sure what was up, eh? Well, you played me for a fool, and you played me right— and here you are. What did you expect to get out of me, anyhow?"

"The stones— you can't get away with it," muttered Matthews. Lewis shook his head.

"Tut, tut! Bad grammar, my friend. I'm getting away with murder right now, it seems. Just what is your game?"

Matthews glared at him, licked his lips, and said nothing.

"Sullen, eh? Well. suit yourself," said Lewis carelessly. 'Apparently our little fracas passed unobserved, so I'll just get the hotel detective up here, if they have one. I've a notion you gentlemen may be known to the London police."

He went over to the telephone.

"Go ahead if you're fool enough," snarled Matthews. "They've got nothing on us, anyhow— and that's more'n you can say. Want them to find the stones on you, eh? I guess not."

"The stones? Those Sergius jewels you told me about?"

Lewis paused at the instrument, and turned. "Why, what interest could the English police have in them?"

Matthews snarled. "You damned innocent baby— huh! Well, play your own game. You know well enough England wants to grab 'em, and so does France! You know well enough it's anybody's loot who can get it. Where do you fit in, anyhow? Are you with Krenin or not? If not, throw in with me and we'll split the lot."

"Afraid not, thanks," said Lewis. "I don't know what makes you think I have any jewels, for if I have, then it's news to me. H'm! You've got nerve, anyhow. I expect you and the oily gent can get.each other loose after he wakes up, so go

to it. Next time you draw a gun, you want to use it. And I hope you get a good story for your newspaper— a good one! So long."

Throwing open the door, Jim Lewis departed, put on his hat, and sought the elevator.

It was not difficult to figure what had happened. This precious pair of rascals had undoubtedly been on the trail of the soviet agents for some time past— eagles preying on the cormorants. Despite the efforts of the French police, the exposition had brought te Paris flocks of criminals from all countries; but, as all American tourists were carefully treated and practically exempt from regulations, it was easy for Americans of the criminal class to grow fat.

"The beautiful part of it is," thought Lewis uneasily, "these birds hit the nail on the head— meaning me! Either they had dropped on to the general plan of campaign, or else they figured out about what Cyril Krenin and his friends would do. Wonder how many people are after these jewels, anyhow? And was Matthews right when he said they belonged to any one who could loot them? Doesn't sound logical. If it's true, then I've got them, and the game's up to Jenny Gardner. Who is she, anyhow?"

Echo answered who— and nothing more.

Leaving the hotel, Jim Lewis sauntered up the Strand, having plenty of time on hand. His lunch had been a slim one, and he was hungry, not being used to European meal hours, so he resolved not to wait any too long a time on Orley's arrival.

What with traffic impediments and crowds, it was not a short cry to Fleet Street; there were cigarets to buy, windows to look at, and marvelous Englishwomen to wonder upon. Lewis decided that all English dressmakers must come out of madhouses, and was confirmed in his opinion the farther he went.

With all this, he was still well ahead of the appointed hour when he passed the Temple and saw ahead of him the famous Cock. He turned in, did not enter the bar, but mounted the sawdust-thick stairs to the upper floor.

The front table was unoccupied, and he slid into place en the uncomfortable bench under the high settle. Some tourists were just inspecting the ancient fireplace opposite, quite unaware that it had come from another building on a very different site, and blissfully drinking in the ancient inscriptions. With a sigh of relaxation, Jim Lewis took off his light overcoat, took the slender leather case from its pocket, and put the coat on the windowledge.

"Two whisky-and-sodas, double," he said to the waiter. "I'm waiting for another gentleman."

"Very good, sir."

The waiter gone, Lewis took up the leather portfolio— hardly deserving such a name, except in miniature. It was bound about by a strap of the same soft material, and he opened this, then laid the thing itself open.

To his sight showed leather flaps, each fastened by a snap-hook. He plucked at one of these. From a pocket in the pliant leather fell out upon the table half a dozen green stones of varying sizes— emeralds. Jim Lewis knew little of jewels, but it needed no expert to tell these were genuine stones. 'To each was glued a bit of paper on which was a microscopic number in ink.

"The Sergius stones, no doubt about it!" thought Lewis.

NOT for nothing had Ned Orley been birdman these many years. His small-boned features with the boyish yellow mustache bore a bird-like, flitting alertness, and his blue eyes could snap into astonishingly keen flame.

"Hullo, old son!" he exclaimed, sliding abruptly into the seat opposite Lewis. "Your beauty has suffered since this morning— who's been landing on you?"

"Fate," said Lewis. He moved his hand carelessly and uncovered little piles of green, red, and blue stones. After a moment Orley caught the glitter and glanced down.

"Whew! My aunt— what are these things?" he exclaimed, and then peered up at Lewis, narrow-eyed, alert.

"I was just asking myself the same question. Suppose you answer it."

The pilot fingered the stones, and whistled, then covered them with his hand as the waiter hovered. Lewis glanced up.

"We'll take something light— say, sole— until a lady comes to join us. Eh, Orley?"

"Right you are." The waiter scribbled the order and departed. Orley uncovered the stones again and poked at them. "Glory be, you lucky Yank! Where'd you get these?"

"Man gave them to me to carry," said Lewis, and grinned. He showed the soft leather book, then opened his coat and indicated the pockets therein. "Six all told."

"And a lady coming to join us, eh?" Orley leaned back and jerked out a cigaret. "You'll hang for murder yet. I always knew it. Get those ruddy things out of sight and tell me."

"Not much to tell," said Lewis. "Tell me, first, about our fellow-passenger today— you said you knew his business."

Orley jumped. "Eh? Man, are those the Sergius jewels?"

"Suspected but not proven. Who owns them?"

The pilot drew a long breath and stared for a moment.

"You cool devil, you! My brother's in Fleet Street— I know the story. Do you?"

"Mighty little," said Lewis, scooping the stones back into their receptacle. "Heard some snatches of it today— general outline. What I want is facts."

"Scarce," said Orley, and sipped his drink. "Nobody owns them and everybody wants them. Word is out they're in Paris *en route* to America. Our government wants to grab them against soviet debts; so does France— after making a rich thing out of the Ferrari stamps. France would give her eye-teeth to seize the stones, if these are the ones. And to think you've got 'em!"

"Who owns them legally?"

"Anybody who can sell 'em first, I suppose. Prince Sergius had a brother-in-law, I believe, who is in the States, so by all law he would have first claim. But what's law in such a case?"

"Quite a good deal," said Lewis reflectively.

"This chap Matthews, today," went on Orley, "was probably a detective."

"So I thought," said Lewis. 'tHe was not, though. Well, the world's moved fast since last night about this time. I'll give the yarn down to Le Bourget, and save the rest of it until Jenny Gardner blows in. No use talking twice."

The sole arrived, and over it Lewis related the odd sequence of events that had followed the breaking of his watch-crystal. Orley had a large capacity for silence and made no comment until Lewis had finished the story.

"H'm!" he said. "You did plunge into it, eh? Shouldn't have told me this, you know. Might be my duty to report it all."

"Or it might not," said Lewis, smiling a little. "Going back to Paris tomorrow?"

"Yes, by Jove! I was scheduled for the Zurich run, but got out of it. I'm to leave at eleven and hop over with a special, to bring back those brass hats. The lists are pretty full. There'll be no trouble working you in with me, if you want to go."

"Good," said Lewis. ''I can't see the door— keep your eye on it. If you see the prettiest girl in London come in, beckon her over this way."

Orley looked up at some one just beyond the partition, and rose to his feet with a beaming smile. Lewis started up, and turned to see Jenny Gardner at his elbow.

"Not a half bad description, old chap," said Orley audaciously. Jenny Gardner looked at him in surprised recognition.

"Oh— you're the pilot who brought us over this morning! And you're here, Mr. Lewis?"

"Here as usual." Lewis shook hands energetically. "Come, sit down!. Let me present my friend Ned Orley. He's English, but can't help that, and you'll forget it when you know him. He's one of these flying men you read about—used to bring down a Boche every morning before breakfast. How are you, young lady? Evidently you got my message, since you're here."

The girl took the seat beside Orley, facing Lewis. She regarded him with an expression half serious, half anxious, and he interpreted it aright.

"Cheer up, young lady— you're among friends. I was just telling Orley about all these pretty stones in my pocket, and he's going to run us back to Paris tomorrow before the police get hold of us—"

"See here," broke in Orley, "for the love of heaven curb that tongue of yours! He's a cheerful idiot, Miss Gardner; you know, I'm not supposed to be learning so much—"

The girl broke into a laugh.

"Oh, it's nothing to make light of," she said, "yet you two are funny— and you are a cheerful idiot, Mr. Lewis!"

"You mean Jim," retorted Lewis promptly. She nodded, her eyes dancing.

"All right, if it makes you happy. Do you know who that man Matthews was, today?"

"Now, there's a sample of what I like about this young woman," said Lewis gravely, to the little pilot. 'Nine out of ten would hem and haw, and ask who you were and whether you had a good character, and so forth, and could keep a secret. And what does the tenth do? Why, she laughs and locks elbows and carries on— because I say you're a friend of mine!"

"Not for a minute," said Jenny Gardner. "But because I like Mr. Orley. Now, stop all this foolishness, please! Where's that man Matthews?"

"Search me," said Lewis. "Last I saw him he was tied to a chair in his room at the Savoy, cursing me heartily. Here's the waiter. Let's have some of this Yorkshire pudding and apple tart and anything else you fancy."

They relapsed into the business of ordering. The girl's eyes touched lightly on Jim Lewis, and he knew his marks were being noted. When the waiter was gone, she leaned forward on both elbows and spoke seriously.

"Get down to earth, now. Matthews followed you today?"

"Followed who?" demanded Lewis, a twinkle in his eyes.

"You, Jim!"

"He did. I went to my firm's office, and he was there. I took him to the Savoy and he claimed to be a newspaper man—" Lewis recounted briefly his experiences at the hotel. "I imagine those two scoundrels are plain crooks, aren't they?"

"Crooks, but not plain ones. Very slippery ones, indeed," said the girl soberly. "They are dangerous men, Jim!"

"So'm I," said Jim promptly. "I'll bet they think so about now. Well, are these things in my pocket the Sergius jewels or not?"

"Yes,"

"That relieves the agony." Lewis lighted a cigaret and leaned back. "It's your game, Jenny, so let's have the story. So long as no great separation is involved, you can count on me to back you up. Same goes for Orley, here. Are you trying to bag the stones for yourself, or for somebody else? Fit up the puzzle pieces."

She nodded.

"First, there are two men downstairs waiting for you to come out."

"Bantoff?"

"And another, yes. He's the confidential soviet agent here in London. What they're all trying to do is to land those stones in the United States. Some of their agents there have been cabling about it ever since the collection was discovered, and arranged to send over a reliable man to get the stones."

"And you?"

"I," said the girl quietly, "am secretary to the chief soviet agent in New York."

Orley shook his head. "Too thick, Miss Gardner— a bit thick!" He met her eyes and smiled in his alert, engaging manner. "Can't come that on us, you know. You're no bolshie."'

"It's true."

"And what of it?"' said Jim Lewis. "Orley, back down. If Jenny says a thing, it's so. She won't be a bolshevist secretary very long, though! She's going.to quit her job and marry me, after this present imbroglio is ended. Meantime—"

A spot of color came into the girl's cheeks, and her gaze was angry.

"That's going a bit too far, Jim—"

"It's not." Lewis met her eyes and spoke earnestly, steadily. "I mean every word of it. I don't care if you're a dozen bolshevists all rolled into one, Jenny Gardner. I've knocked around this old world quite a bit, I've been in love half a dozen times— but never like this. I'm not going to bother you with any sentimental foolishness at present, but I've declared my intentions and,they'll stand. Now, that being settled, let's get back to business. Just what are you doing in Paris, and what's your game?"

"I want to steal those stones," she said quietly, her eyes fastened upon him.

"All right,'' said Lewis cheerfully. "I've got 'em for you, and they're yours."

"But not for myself." She laughed a little. "You don't understand yet. I was in the red group as an agent for the Department of Justice— a spy," she amended with a trace of bitterness, "if you prefer the word."

"What ho!" exclaimed Orley. "I said you were no bolshie!"

"The brother of Prince Sergius, or more correctly his brother-in-law, Grand Duke Ivan, is in America," went on the girl. "When he heard about the discovery of these jewels, he persuaded me to leave my employment and go after the jewels for him— they belong to him legally, as heir of Prince Sergius. He's rather influential, and arranged everything. I managed to be sent over to Krenin in Paris by the group in New York, for they knew my record was clear and nobody would suspect my activities, while they are continually watched. I've been in Paris ever since, working with Krenin, I arranged for a trusty man to be sent over for the jewels and persuaded Krenin to sell them in America, and so forth. My job is to get them for Grand Duke Ivan. They are worth several millions. Ten per cent. comes to me as reward if I succeed. And there's the whole thing. I imagine you'll not think very highly of my position!"

ORLEY had listened to this in vivacious interest, his face aglow; Jim Lewis, in reflective silence. He broke this silence, soberly enough, a new gravity in his manner.

"No, I don't think much of your position, Jenny," he said, and she colored again. "But I think more highly of you than ever, by gosh! Now, young lady, I appoint myself your assistant all over again. But, with your permission, I'm going to give orders. First thing, you separate yourself from this whole gang, Krenin and all the rest. To avert suspicion, we'll stage a fake arrest in Paris. You can then break with Krenin, as your usefulness to him will be ended. You're an American and he won't care a hang about you anyhow."

"I'm afraid he does, though," she said simply. Lewis's face changed as he caught the implication.

"Oh, is that so? Very well. Leave the arrangements to me. Now, where are you to land these stones to get the reward? Are you sure of getting it?"'

"Absolutely— the grand duke is wealthy, and above suspicion. If I get the stones, I'm to give them to his lawyer in Paris, who has full authority to act for him. The lawyer is a man named Amelin, of the court of appeals, and of the highest professional and personal standing."

"All right,"' said Lewis. "Your job here is to turn me over to Bantoff intact, eh? His is to put me aboard a ship for New York intact. At New York Ill be met by eager gentlemen, eh?"

The girl nodded. Lewis met the inquiring gaze of Orley, and grinned cheerfully.

"Going to be a hot game, old man! Let's give our attention to dinner and talk about the weather. No hitch about your special flight tomorrow?"

"Not a chance," said Orley. "I'll bring those brass caps back, fair or foul.''

"Then I'm with you. Now for the roast beef of old England!"

The three attacked dinner, and Orley shifted the talk to matters of no importance— talk maintained only by obvious efforts, until Jenny Gardner's slight constraint left her under the spell of the vivacious little pilot and the seemingly irresponsible American. Presently she was laughing again, and when the waiter brought on the apple tart and coffee the three were to all appearance in gay and light-hearted mood.

"Now to business," said Lewis blithely. "Orley, slip me that newspaper behind you on the window-shelf."'

The pilot obeyed. Lewis got out all six of his jewel-cases, then opened out on the table the two' gaily colored silk handkerchiefs he had found in his pockets, putting them one over the other. Into these he emptied the six pocketbooks, making a pile of shimmering, glowing stones at sight of which Orley's eyes widened. The girl looked on with a puzzled frown.

"No time for examination now,' declared Lewis, and shoved the empty cases at Orley. "Here, get busy filling the pockets with wads of paper! Not too bulky, now."

While he spoke, he was carefully knotting the corners of the handkerchiefs together. He thus made of the glowing treasure a compact little bundle and weighed it in his hand.

"The stones may cut through the silk, but the double thickness should hold until tomorrow, anyhow," he observed. Jenny Gardner had fallen to work with Orley on the empty cases, and as these were filled, Lewis closed them and stowed them in the prepared pockets. "Jenny," he said, ''you've done your errand when you turn me over to Bantoff. Make tracks for Paris! Take the night boat from Southampton— the train doesn't leave Waterloo station for another hour, so you have plenty of time. Report to Krenin, and meet me at a terrace table outside the Café Madrid at three tomorrow. Can do?"

She nodded, half-puzzled. "Yes. But the stones—"

"Here, catch!" Lewis chucked them into the lap of the pilot, who lifted an astonished and dismayed countenance to him. "Put 'em in your pocket, Orley, and I'll get 'em back from you tomorrow. Meet you at Croydon at eleven— I may turn up at the last minute, so hang on for me."

"Here, I say!" exclaimed the pilot hurriedly.

"Don't say it." Lewis chuckled, rose, and laid a note on the table to pay for dinner. "Stay here ten minutes longer, then go home to roost like a good chap."

"What are you going to do?" asked the girl, worried.

"Me? I'm going downstairs with you, and get turned over to Mr. Bantoff. Hand me my coat, Orley— thanks. Is this Bantoff a sharp one?"

"No, he's stupid," said the girl doubtfully. "But—"

"No buts allowed. Come along. See you in the morning, Orley! Good luck."

"Good luck, blast you," said the pilot. "Good night Miss Gardner—don't let this wild American get his skull cracked before morning!"

"I think he's safe enough," and the girl smiled as she shook hands. "Until he gets to Paris, that is. Jim, please stop and think about this—"

"Thinking never pays," said Jim Lewis cheerfully. 'Come along!"'

THEY descended the narrow stairs. In the entry below stood the tall old porter, resplendent in his uniform and medals, and beyond him two men talking together. These turned and came forward, and Jenny Gardner spoke.

"This is Mr. Lewis, Mr. Bantoff—"

Lewis shook hands heartily with a heavy-featured, black-clad man. The other he recognized as his chauffeur of the morning.

"Glad to meet you," he exclaimed cordially. "Why didn't you come upstairs and join us?"

"We had dined," said Bantoff, rather surprised by the question. "And we were not certain about finding you—"

"Well, I'm here and all's well, though I had a narrow shave this afternoon. Tell you about it later. Miss Gardner says she's going back to Paris tonight by the Southampton boat— suppose we go along and see her off, eh?"

Bantoff swallowed hard, quite taken aback by this breezy conspirator from America.

"Why— I suppose so," he said vaguely. "You have everything?"

"Hope so," Lewis flung open overcoat and coat, to show the leather portfolios in their pockets, while the two Russians looked on aghast. "All's well. Got your passport and money, Jenny?"

"Yes, thank you," she responded coolly.

Bantoff's companion went out and signaled a taxicab, and the four climbed in. Bantoff seemed much agitated, and laid a hand on the knee of Lewis.

"My dear Mr. Lewis, you really must show more caution!' he exclaimed. "I've heard about that detective this morning—"

"He wasn't a detective, he was a crook," Lewis interrupted. "And he caught me, but he paid for it. Evidently he had been trailing Cyril, for he guessed I had the stones, and came right along. Count him out of it, however. Everything going well with your plans?"

"Quite well." said Bantoff. "You don't think that man is still following you?"

Lewis laughed. "Not he! Believe me, he's sick of his job."

"Well, then," Bantoff sighed in relief. "The responsibility has been a weight upon me. I have arranged everything; you leave tomorrow evening and catch the Alertic at Liverpool in the morning— I'll go with you and see you off. She's a first and third cabin ship and you'll have no trouble whatever on arrival at New York."

"No, people with fortunes to smuggle don't take slow boats," said Lewis.

"Excellent! You're to be congratulated on doing things right. I can't say as much for Krenin— letting that crook get on my trail was a bad break for him. However, we'd best not discuss it further. Haven't you a grip, Miss Gardner?"

"Yes, but Mr. Bantoff will have to ship it to me. Fortunately, there's little in it, and I can get whatever I need at the station. You'll attend to instructing New York about meeting our friend, Comrade Bantoff?"

"Everything is arranged," said the Russian confidently. "Tell Krenin to leave things in my hands, absolutely. When do you return to the States?"

"Not for a month or so."

Silence fell, and lasted until they came into the station. Here the girl vanished and by the time her ticket was procured, showed up again with a parcel under her arm. The three men saw her aboard the train, which was open, and then Jim Lewis shook hands.

"Good-by and good luck!" he said, when the others had left the compartment.

"And to you," she answered. Swiftly, he stooped and touched her lips, and then was gone. Outside, he looked up at the compartment window and waved his hand— and she responded with a smile. Jim Lewis threw his hat six feet in the air, caught it, and was hastily dragged away by the dismayed Russians.

"We must not draw attention like this," blurted Bantoff.

"It's all right," Jim assured him. "All Americans are crazy, my dear chap, so come on and forget it. Where are we going?"

"To my house in Kensington. You can remain with me until tomorrow night, in safety."

"Thanks. I've an engagement for tenfifteen tomorrow morning, though. Can you run me downtown in your car?"

Bantoff was at once agitated all over again. "But is it safe?" he growled. "You know, it is best to stay out of sight—"

Lewis laughed and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Safe as can be, old man! Just between ourselves, I have a date with a certain lady, who will be kinder to me than Miss Gardner. We are to meet at Gatti's, and lunch later. Sorry I can't ask you to join us, but you understand these things—"

Bantoff caught him by the arm, a most unhappy man.

"I beg of you, reconsider!" he urged anxiously. "It is dangerous, this meeting with ladies. Women are always dangerous. And with the precious things you carry—"

"I've thought of that," said Lewis, with a confidential air. "Listen! Before going, I'll put these things you mention into my handbag, and lock it. You'll take care of it until I come back, in the course of the afternoon. Believe me, I shall take no chances with these stones!"

Bantoff wiped his face in relief. "Very well, very well," he assented. "After your experience today with that man, you are running risks— but so long as your burden is safe, all right. Here, now, is a taxi—"

The three bundled into a taxicab.

LEWIS chuckled to himself at the anxious, worried air of this chief conspirator. Bantoff was far from the level of Cyril Krenin either in intelligence or craft, and was obviously in deep consternation over the free-and-easy manner of the emissary from America. The other two talked briefly, and Lewis gathered Bantoff had been at a consultation in Paris some time previously regarding the affair of the jewels. This brought to mind a question Lewis had forgotten to ask the girl.

"Tell me something, Bantoff," he said. "Here you are keeping awake nights over this business, and Krenin is not a fool despite his folly. Why, then, did you people appoint such a preposterous meeting-place as a bridge over the Seine, the exposition bridge at that, and a silly password?"

"I'll tell you why," said Bantoff gloomily. "We did not know who would come from America; it would have to be some one who could return absolutely unsuspected— an American, a tourist. There have been riots and demonstrations around the embassies in Paris, and the French police watch all of us like rats. The Poles, the English, the Germans, all have spies in Paris to keep watch over us; here, as well. Therefore, not knowing what might turn up at any moment, we dared not risk things by having the messenger come to Krenin direct. So we wrote even the password in code, and appointed a meeting place that certainly would not be suspected."

"Hm! You did that, all right," commented Lewis. "Why didn't you send the stones by Miss Gardner?"

"We thought of it, but dared not risk it— she was known as the secretary of our agency in New York." Bantoff threw out his hands. "The whole world is against us! We did the best we could, that's all, depending on New York to send us a sure man. Now, if all goes well, tomorrow night will see you on your way— but I don't like this business of the man who followed you!"

"We might attend to that man here," suggested the chauffeur. "Who was he, comrade?"

Thoughtlessly, Lewis gave the names of Matthews and Harrison. The two Russians spoke together in their own tongue, then the chauffeur stopped the taxicab and alighted. The taxi rolled on westward to Kensington and stopped in a quiet side street near Prince's Gate.

Lewis followed his host into the house, unhesitatingly. He felt absolutely confident now of winning this game against such an adversary as Bantoff, who lacked all the Tartar cunning of Krenin. A manservant admitted them, a dumpy little woman came, kissing Bantoff on both cheeks, and Lewis was introduced to Madam Bantoff; then the Russian beckoned him into a library where coffee and liqueurs were served, with cigarets. The two men were alone.

"I would like to see those stones," said Bantoff almost at once.

Lewis lighted a cigaret and regarded the man steadily.

"Think well what you're saying, Bantoff," he returned. "In the first place, Krenin gave me no stones."

"Eh? What?" The Russian started up from his chair. "You—"

"Krenin gave me nothing," said Lewis gravely. "A certain Count Gregory, in the presence of Krenin, gave me six leather cases." He opened his coat and showed one of them. "I did not ask what was in these cases. I did not open them. I simply put them into the pockets made to fit them, and there they remain. If they pass out of my possession for an instant, if any stones are missing when I reach New York— then what? Shall I say that the only person to have seen the stones was a certain Bantoff in London, who brought me to his house and then made the demand—"

"No, no, no," exclaimed the other explosively. "For the love of heaven, say no more! You are right. You are not so irresponsible a man as I thought you. Keep the things unopened, by all means. But before I return the cases to you tomorrow night, before you leave England, you must make certain in the presence of witnesses that the stones are intact— after having left them in my care."

"That is only just," said Lewis reflectively. "Yes, that is only just. I'll do it."

Bantoff sighed in relief, and stirred his coffee.

Half an hour afterward, Lewis thankfully found himself alone in an old-fashioned English bedroom. Then he stopped, thoughtfully, to stare at his bag. He had quite forgotten to say anything about that bag being at the Savoy, or the room he had obtained there— yet here was the bag awaiting him.

"H'm! These beggars aren't such fools after all," he murmured reflectively. "I'd better watch my step tomorrow morning!"

Struggling into his resplendent silk pajamas, he was abed and asleep in five minutes.

Next morning after breakfast, Jim sent for his bag, and while Bantoff looked on, he put into it the six leather books. Then he locked it and turned the key over to Bantoff. After that was taken care of he left in the Daimler limousine for Gatti's, but, while on the way, he asked the chauffeur to drop him at the American Express office. He told him he would walk the rest of the way.

Lewis lost no time. He saw the car sweep around the corner below, and then walked out to the nearest taxicab on the rank.

"Croydon aerodrome, and make it in a hurry," he said, and climbed in.

Twenty seconds later, he was on his way.

FIVE minutes before eleven, Lewis alighted, paid his driver, and was seized upon by Ned Orley.

"Come along! Go in and check up and pay your passage— the bus is ready. I'm taking over a DH and we'll make time with this breeze. All well?"

"So far, thanks."

The little pilot had paved the way, and Lewis went through the formalities in quick order, an attendant taking him out to the field. A Dutch Fokker was just taking off, a Paris bus was coming in, and the field was active. Orley had already tested and approved his engine when Lewis climbed into the De Haviland and joined him. The chocks were pulled out, the machine roared, jerked into life, ran and lifted soaringly, a stiff breeze at her back. Orley was too busy for talk— he got his antenna reeled out, reported to Croydon, headed for Paris at three thousand feet, and relaxed. He gave Lewis a flashing smile.

"Looking better this morning! Gave them the slip, did you?"

"Easily enough. I wish you were going to stop over in Paris and see the end of this job with me."

"Can't be done. Better get your stuff out of my side pocket. I can't get it through for you— matter of honor. Besides, you'll not be bothered."

Lewis nodded. He felt in the pilot's pocket 'and transferred to his own the silk-wrapped packet of stones. Suddenly Orley whipped around.

"I forgot! Seen the morning papers? No? Half a minute—"

From beneath him, he whipped a morning paper, and Lewis caught it. He had no need to open the sheet— it was folded to give him the story. There had been a double suicide in a room at the Savoy hotel the previous night. Two Americans had turned on the gas and died; Matthews and Harrison by name, reasons unknown. The story was brief, being a lastminute report.

With a grimace, Lewis met the inquiring glance of the airman, and remembered how the chauffeur had left the taxicab, promising to attend to those two men.

"Sporting crowd, these Russians,' commented Orley.

Le Bourget at last, without incident. Lewis wondered what would happen when Bantoff took a look at the leather cases in the grip, and grinned to himself.

Orley tramped in with him to the *douane*, saw him through the perfunctory examination, and had a taxicab called, as there was no bus to meet this special machine.

"My crowd are on the way here now," said the pilot. "I'll get a bite to eat, and be ready as soon as the DH is in shape to go back. Well, old chap, good-by and good luck!"

Lewis shook hands. "In case we pull through and I want to get word to you—"

"Care of Croydon. My regards to the lady!"

So Lewis started back to Paris.

It was only a little after two when the taxi passed the Gare du Nord, so Lewis directed the driver to his American branch bank in the Place Vendome, having sore need of replenishing his funds. His letter of credit was with his passport, fortunately, and with a pocketful of hundred-franc notes he returned to the taxi and directed it to the Café Madrid.

Two-thirty. Lewis paid off his driver, glanced over the throng, sitting on the terrace, and saw nothing of Jenny Gardner. He went inside, got a corner table, and ordered a hasty luncheon; asked the waiter, also, to get him the address of M. Amelin, *avocat*, of the Court of Appeals. The address came, written down—114 Rue Saint-Dominique.

Lewis attacked his meal, keeping one eye on the terrace. Three o'clock,and no Jenny. He went outside, took a vacant table, and ordered coffee. The big white clock on the opposite building marked three-five, three-ten, and no Jenny Gardner. His uneasiness passed into anxiety as he remembered what had happened to the two crooks in London.

Then, as he stared out frowningly at the boulevard, he saw her.

She was across the street, sauntering along, casting glances his way. He was sure, as he stared, she saw him and gestured. He cursed his folly, and waited— of course she was being followed! How long had she been looking into shop-windows over there, hoping he would see her?

Once more she glanced across, and he was sure now she saw him watching. He made no motion, waited. Directly before her was a passage—a narrow arcade, piercing the center of a long block, lined with all manner of tiny

shops. Lewis laid a five-franc note on the the table, took his hat, and rose. His brain was working swiftly.

He knew nothing of this particular arcade, but knew most of them in Paris were alike, with numbers of branch passages running to side streets. If he followed the girl, he would certainly be seen by any one shadowing her. So, instead, he crossed the boulevard and strode rapidly down the first street to the left of the block. Almost before he realized it, he came to a dark little entry, with an array of shops inside— a side branch to the arcade. He ducked into it, and hastened. When he reached the main passage, Jenny Gardner was only ten feet away, coming toward him.

Her eyes widened at sight of him. Then he saw the strained, anxious look in her face, and hastily ducked back into the branch. She followed, with a swift word.

"You shouldn't have shown yourself— I'm followed! I think Krenin is suspicious of something. You're still in the same clothes— they'll recognize you at once. You—"

He cut short her breathless protests and tucked her arm in his.

"All right, you just come along with me, young lady, and forget your troubles.. Ask no questions, but walk! That's the ticket. One thing— you have absolute confidence in this Grand Duke you're working for, and his lawyer?"

"Absolutely," she said, with an inquiring glance.

Lewis nodded. Out in the Rue Vivienne again, he darted to the curb and halted a taxicab whose flag wasup. Jenny Gardner climbed in, and Lewis followed, giving the address of Amelin. As the machine started off with a jerk, he collapsed on the seat beside her.

"You know his address?" cried the girl.

"Found it. This is my party, so don't get too curious. Did Krenin get any messages since noon?"

"A telegram."

Lewis whistled. "I thought so! When Bantoff missed me, he got curious or suspicious or both, and wired Krenin. And the good Cyril is having you shadowed, eh? Well, he'll have a job trailing you the road we'll take inside of two hours! Will you be content to leave everything to me?"

"Yes," she said. Lewis put out his hand and her fingers came into it with a firm grip. "But tell me— was there any trouble with Bantoff?"

Lewis grinned. "Not a chance! The poor boob was an easy mark. Hello— he's crossing the river— where's this place of ours, anyway?"

They were heading across the upper end of the Tuileries Gardens for the river.

"It's all right," she responded. 'Near the Invalides. Do you think any one's after us?"

"We should worry,' said Lewis coolly. "Let the heathen rage! We've bilked them neatly, and you'll earn your commission. Better give a share to Ned Orley— he's earned it. Does this Amelin know you?"

"No, but he knows I'll bring the stones if I get them, and I have my passport here for proof of identity. Tell me— have you got them?"

"I have!' said Lewis, meeting her eyes. "And since we're in Paris, and it's only right to express one's feelings in the manner of Parisians, why—"

He suited action to words, and Jenny Gardner's eyes danced. Then they sobered, and she restrained him gently.

"Jim! Twice is quite enough for reward— otherwise, it would become habit."

"I mean it shall," he announced promptly.

"Ah, but I've something to say about that," she said, and her gravity checked him. "No more, please!"

"But you can't say you don't like it!" he exclaimed in dismay. She laughed, and patted his hand.

"Never you mind, young man. You're altogether too irresponsible."

"Therefore, I need some one to be responsible for me."

"A person whom you never saw until yesterday morning?"

"Nonsense—"

"No, common sense. Stop philandering and straighten your hat. There's Sainte-Dominique— we must be nearly there."

They were. In another block or so the taxicab slowed, and drew up before one-fourteen. Bidding the driver wait, Lewis entered and opened the door of the concierge.

They told the amazed lawyer their plans, got a receipt, and five minutes later descended into the street again.

"Satisfied, Jenny?"

"It's your game," she said, a breath of excitement in her voice. "Play it!"

He laughed, and led her out to the taxicab. Giving the driver an address, he climbed in.

"There's another cab at the curb a little way back," said the girl, looking through the tiny rear light as they moved away. "I'm afraid—"

"Never be afraid. It doesn't pay— plenty of taxicabs in Paris!"

She turned dancing eyes to him. "You really mean to leave at once?"

"You bet. Is there anything you can't buy at a shop or two?"

"Nothing, given the shop."

"Right. Then we don't part company— I'm taking no chances. If you've any spare money, let me have it. I'll need all we can raise. You can have what's left for spending money—"

The girl opened her hand-bag and produced a number of thousand-franc notes, with some American greenbacks. The taxi was by this time speeding across the Place de la Concorde, and Lewis thrust the money away without counting it. Presently the taxi came to rest outside a steamship office. Lewis paid the driver, dismissed him, and entered with Jenny Gardner.

"When is your next west-bound boat for Marseilles?" he asked at the counter. The clerk laughed.

"Next one leaves Marseilles noon tomorrow— you're a bit late for it."

"Why late?" queried Lewis.

"Well, you'd have to get the eight-o'clock *rapide* tonight if you made it—"'

"Where does the boat go?"

"Gibraltar, Azores, Havana and New Orleans, with a few points between."

"Get me two cabins, or two berths— myself and this lady. We'll make it."

"I'll have to wire Marseilles and hold the space there. You'll have no trouble— she's not running full."

"So much the better; won't have to spend our money until tomorrow, Jenny! Here's one of your thousands back. Come along—and send that wire for me, partner!"

Outside the office, the girl caught at his arm, laughing.

"Now what, whirlwind?"

"Come back to my hotel with me. I'll bundle up my things, check out, have the agent there get us space on the Marseilles flyer tonight, and we'll have dinner. Then we'll be off. Before we get to New Orleans, we may combine cabins and have a ceremony by the captain— Suit you?"

"All but the cabins and the ceremony—"

"I'll take chances on that! Come along!"

And laughing, Jenny Gardner obeyed with reckless excitement in her dancing eyes.

JIM LEWIS was stopping— or had been until other events intervened—at the Hotel de Europe, an immense tourist caravansary on the Rue de Rivoli.

Passing by the desk, he stated he was checking out and wanted his bill ready when he came down, then went on and deposited Jenny Gardner in the ladies' lounge, fairly empty at this tea-hour. Near the door stood one of the bemedalled attendants, and Lewis paused at his side, holding out a fifty-franc note .which was mechanically put out of sight.

"I'm M. Lewis, in room two thirty," he said, and indicated Jenny Gardner. "That young lady is my fiancée. She has been bothered today by the attentions of a couple of Russians. If they show up here and speak to her, while I'm gone, throw 'em out— arrest them— anything!"

"With pleasure, monsieur," and the attendant grinned. He loved Russians like most of the Parisians. He saluted, and Lewis passed on to the elevator. He must pack in a hurry, for the girl wanted to visit some of the near-by shops before dinner.

Once in his room, Lewis telephoned below and ordered two tickets and wagon-lit reservations for the Marseilles express that night, then went ahead with his packing. He snapped the last lock as the boy arrived for the bags, and sent them down to the check-room. Then, going direct to the desk, he paid his bill and turned to the ladies' lounge.

Jenny Gardner was not there.

It required half a minute for this fact to soak in. Then Lewis was aware of the attendant approaching, wearing a worried expression.

"M'Sieu! A gentleman appeared—"

"Confound you!" snapped Lewis, or words to that effect in French. "What was he like?"

"A dark gentleman, young, well-dressed. I was about to intervene when the mademoiselle greeted him, and naturally I dared not make a scene. They went out together, by the Rue de Rivoli entrance there—"

"A dark man, with smooth-shaven face, high cheek-bones— like a Tartar?"

"Something of the sort, m'sieu—"

So Krenin had trapped her, after all! No matter how. The smooth rascal had perhaps frightened the girl stiff with his first words, had carried her off—

LEWIS put for the entrance. As he went, he saw by the big clock across the corridor it was just five-thirty. Hesaw, too, something else that galvanized him into action— the whiskered features of Count Gregory.

The whole thing burst over him with stunning force. Krenin had carried off Jenny Gardner, somehow— and now Gregory was seeking out the American with a demand for the jewels! They had been well trailed after all, shadowed from place to place; Krenin had acted swiftly and promptly. Now he was making back for Rue Jasmin with the girl, leaving Count Gregory here to bargain for the stones—

"I'll beat 'em to it!' thought Jim Lewis, emerging into the street. "'I'll get there before they suspect that I'm wise to their game, and T'll go through that outfit hard!"

An alert taxi wheeled in to the curb, and Lewis flung open the door.

"Rue Jasmin, corner of Avenue Mozart. Make it inside fifteen minutes, double fare."

Such a challenge was like wine in the blood to any Parisian chauffeur equipped with fourwheel brakes and devilish ingenuity. The taxi ducked traffic, shot across the Place de la Concorde, went up the Champs Elysées in defiance of a spluttering agent, and roared along to the Etoile at maniac speed. Then a spurt into the Avenue Victor Hugo, and there was every prospect of the driver earning his double fee.

He earned it. With two minutes to spare, he triumphantly drew up beside the Jasmine metro station, and Lewis jumped out, paid him, and started up the short street. He did not know the number, but knew where the apartment of Krenin was located, in the second block. In his pocket still reposed the pistol he had knocked from the hand of Matthews.

He glimpsed the apartment house, ahead. A taxicab was just drawing away from the entrance— the same, no doubt, in which Jenny Gardner had been brought! He could not be more than a few moments behind, in any event. So he came to the entrance, looked in, saw no one; the concierge was not in evidence. Lewis passed the door of this guardian, took the stairs to the left, and mounted swiftly.

Third floor— right. There was no light here on the landing. He tried the door, quietly. It opened to his hand— unlocked. He was in the unlighted hallway of Krenin's flat, gloomy with the fading daylight. From the salon at the rear came Krenin's voice in French.

"What? Allo— allo! Listen, Gregory! You say he is not there?"

Lewis grinned and started for the salon. That was Count Gregory at the hotel, then!

"Find him," snapped Krenin, and then fired off a string of Russian. He evidently turned from the telephone to address some one else in the room, for his voice sounded in accents of disgusted irritation. "I don't see how the fool could have bungled! We know they were both there together—"

The door closed, losing the remainder to Jim Lewis. Drawing his pistol, he slipped along the hall, but in the other direction—toward the bedroom where he had first wakened. Two rooms here; he slipped in, found the first empty, darted to the other. Empty, likewise. Then Jenny Gardner must be in the little salon at the other end of the corridor, with Krenin!

Turning, he repassed the length of the corridor. Two doors, probably opening into kitchen and dining-room, he left closed. At the salon door he paused, listening, catching the voice of Krenin in low murmurs. Abruptly he flung open the door and entered, pistol at hip.

Krenin and another man, a stranger, sat there at the table. They turned at his intrusion and stared, slack-jawed with astonishment.

"Where is she?" snapped Lewis in English, his French deserting him for the moment. "Hurry up, there! Where've you put her?"

Krenin came to his feet.

"You— here! What does it mean, then—"

Lewis recollected himself. "It means you're a dead one, m'sieu, unless you produce Mlle. Gardner this moment! Where is she?"

Krenin's amazement became bewilderment.

"She? Produce her? But, name of the devil! That is the very thing I want—"

Lewis stood absolutely paralyzed for an instant, as over him burst full realization of his ghastly error.

There was no doubting the utter bewilderment of Krenin. In a flash, Lewis perceived how he had jumped at conclusion— how perhaps, even now, Jenny Gardner was awaiting him at the hotel! Some one else had met her, some one whom she knew—

"Why, she is at the Hotel de l'Europe! I just had word—" burst out Krenin, then broke off, recovered himself, swept into sudden anger. "And you, what are you doing in Paris? Why have you come back— why did Bantoff wire me something was wrong?"

"The devil!" muttered Lewis. He was stupefied; for once his brain refused to function. Then he woke up. He must get out of here—

A change of expression on Krenin's face, a sound from behind— the valet whom he had quite forgotten.

Lewis whirled, saw the man there behind him in the doorway. For the barest fraction of an instant, all four men were motionless, silent; bewilderment, surprise, comprehension of error, held them in a grip of shifting emotions. Then Krenin exploded in swift worcs. The valet flung himself at Lewis, who threw up the pistol and pressed the trigger.

He had forgotten to remove the safety catch.

Blindly grappling, the valet bore him backward, then fell over a chair and went headlong, Krenin and the fourth man piling in. Lewis hardly resisted. Upon him was the heartbreaking realization of his folly, his crass stupidity, his headlong succession of errors— the comprehension which stifles a man with its sense of utter failure.

Still gripping the useless pistol, he went to the floor under them, all three smashing at him in frenzied triumph, incredulous of their easy victory. They panted out curses, orders, showered down blows, impeded one another. The valet wrenched out one of Lewis's arms, and sat onit. The stranger flung

himself across his legs and reached for his throat. Krenin, erect, launched a savage kick.

This kick brought Lewis to himself.

His right arm was pinned down beneath the valet, but his hand, holding the pistol, was free. He released the weapon, found the safety catch with his fingers, threw it off— then had the weapon in his clutch again. Twisting his wrist, he fired almost at random. With his left hand he smashed the valet under the angle of the jaw. The man fell away. Lewis fired again, and wrenched himself clear.

To the hot double report of the pistol, the little room filled with oaths and imprecations. The valet sprawled kicking on the floor. The stranger, flung from the legs of Lewis, rolled to the door and then picked himself up. Lewis saw Cyril Krenin fall, one hand grasping at his throat, death in his face— then the stranger whipped out a pistol, fired. Lewis returned the shot, missed, but the Russian fled and waited for no more. Lewis found himself master of the field— with his left arm hanging helpless and blood trickling down over his hand. That one return bullet had gone home.

The valet struggled up, flung forward blindly— Lewis stepped aside and drove out with his foot. Caught again under the jaw, the hapless valet groaned and fell backward. Lewis darted out into the corridor, but the third Russian was gone and the hall door stood open.

AN INSTANT the American stood in the doorway of the salon, hesitant. No more mistakes, now! The shots would mean uproar, police, flocking tenants— and Krenin was done for. The strange Russian had gone down the front stairs, evidently—

Swiftly, Lewis stopped for his hat, flung the pistol into the salon, and darted to the door of the kitchen, midway of the corridor. It stood slightly ajar. He slipped in, heard a mad hurly -burly of voices, then slammed the door. Ahead of him was the rear door of the apartment, opening on a tiny stairs descending to the courtyard of the building.

He went down these stairs two at a time, gained the courtyard, glimpsed half a dozen figures thronging up the front stairs, and slipped out and past them to the street— thankful for the one-entrance system of Paris apartments. Once outside, he straightened his hat, worked his almost helpless left hand into his coat pocket, and went away from there at a sharp walk. Before he had gone a hundred feet, a taxi rounded the corner ahead and came to his signal.

Twenty-five minutes later, with a ragged hole in his left arm rudely bandaged, Jim Lewis walked into the Hotel de l'Europe. He went directly to the

lounge— and there came face to face with Jenny Gardner, as he turned a corner. With her was a slender, eager young man laden with parcels.

"Jim!" she exclaimed. "Where on earth have you been! The attendant said you had come back, then had started out like a lunatic—"

"Where have you been, you mean," returned Lewis. "I thought Krenin had got you— and I went to his place to find you."

"Oh!" She whitened a little. "I never thought you'd be back so quickly— here,Billy Brown, of the American consulate, blew in and I took him along as guard while I bought some things— Billy, this is Mr. Lewis, whom I was telling you about! Jim— you don't mean you went to the Rue Jasmin?"

Lewis nodded to the man from the consulate, then looked grimly at Jenny Gardner.

"Yes," he said. "Why not? The attendant said you'd gone off with a dark man—"

HE SAW the girl's face change, and turned. Approaching them, with an air of eager interest, was the whiskered Count Gregory. Lewis took a step toward him.

"So here you are! Gregory, I've just come from the Rue Jasmin," he said rapidly. "The police have discovered everything. They're searching for you. Krenin is dead, shot. Get out! You've time to make your escape if you go at once—"

Count Gregory stared at him with fallen jaw, plucked at his whiskers— then turned and was gone like a shot. Jim Lewis swung around, chuckling.

"It worked! Now, young lady, we've got to get out of France, and get quick—"

"Jim— did you mean that— about Krenin?"

He met her eyes squarely, and what he read in them made his heart leap.

"I mean it," he said.

"Look here," exclaimed Billy Brown, with some excitement. "What's wrong with your arm? Your coat sleeve's torn— why, there's blood on it—"

"Shut up," snapped Lewis, with a glance around. He turned to the girl. "Well, Jenny? Going or not?"

For answer, she gestured to the wide-eyed Brown.

"Billy, thanks a whole lot! Give me my packages— that's right. Now run along and forget you've seen us. Jim, where are the Marseilles tickets?"

"Over here at the desk, I suppose—"

"Then don't talk so much— come along!"

So Jim Lewis left Paris.

———————

5: The Distortion Out of Space

Francis Flagg

George Henry Weiss, 1898-1946

Weird Tales, Aug 1934

BACK OF Bear Mountain the meteor fell that night. Jim Blake and I saw it falling through the sky. As large as a small balloon it was and trailed a fiery tail. We knew it struck earth within a few miles of our camp, and later we saw the glare of a fire dully lighting the heavens. Timber is sparse on the farther slope of Bear Mountain, and what little there is of it is stunted and grows in patches, with wide intervals of barren and rocky ground. The fire did not spread to any extent and soon burned itself out.

Seated by our campfire we talked of meteoroids, those casual visitants from outer space which are usually small and consumed by heat on entering earth's atmosphere. Jim spoke of the huge one that had fallen in northern Arizona be fore the coming of the white man; and of another, more recent, which fell in Siberia.

"Fortunately," he said, "meteors do little damage; but if a large one were to strike a densely populated area, I shudder to think of the destruction to life and property. Ancient cities may have been blotted out in some such catastrophe. I don't believe that this one we just saw fell anywhere near Simpson's ranch."

"No," I said, "it hit too far north. Had it landed in the valley we couldn't have seen the reflection of the fire it started. We're lucky it struck no handier to us.

The next morning, full of curiosity, we climbed to the crest of the mountain, a distance of perhaps two miles. Bear Mountain is really a distinctive hog'sback of some height, with more rugged and higher mountain peaks around and beyond it. No timber grows on the summit, which, save for tufts of bear-grass and yucca, is rocky and bare. Looking down the farther side from the eminence attained, we saw that an area of hillside was blasted and still smoking. The meteor, however, had buried itself out of sight in earth and rock, leaving a deep aater some yards in extent.

About three miles away, in the small valley below, lay Henry Simpson's ranch, seemingly undamaged. Henry was a licensed guide, and when he went into the mountains after deer, we made his place our headquarters. Henry was not visible as we approached, nor his wife; and a certain uneasiness hastened our steps when we perceived that a portion of the house-roof — the house was built of adobe two stories high and had a slightly pitched roof made of rafters across which corrugated iron strips were nailed—was twisted and rent.

"Good heavens!" said Jim; "I hope a fragment of that meteorite hasn't done any damage here."

Leaving the burros to shift for themselves, we rushed into the house. "Hey, Henry!" I shouted. "Henry! Henry!"

Never shall I forget the sight of Henry Simpson's face as he came tottering down the broad stairs. Though it was eight o'clock in the morning, he still wore pajamas. His gray hair was tousled, his eyes staring.

"Am I mad, dreaming?" he cried hoarsely.

He was a big man, all of six feet tall, not the ordinary mountaineer, and though over sixty years of age possessed of great physical strength. But now his shoulders sagged, he shook as if with palsy.

"For heaven's sake, what's the matter?" demanded Jim. "Where's your wife?"

Henry Simpson straightened himself with an eflFort.

"Give me a drink." Then he said strangely: "I'm in my right mind— of course I must be in my right mind— but how can that thing upstairs be possible?"

"What thing? What do you mean?"

"I don't know. I was sleeping soundly when the bright light wakened me. That was Iasi, night, hours and hours ago. Something crashed into the house."

"A piece of the meteorite," said Jim, looking at me.

"Meteorite?"

"One fell last night on Bear Mountain. We saw it fall."

Henry Simpson lifted a gray face. "It may have been that."

"You wakened, you say?"

"Yes, with a cry of fear. I thought the place had been struck by lightning, 'Lydia!' I screamed, thinking of my wife. But Lydia never answered. The bright light had blinded me. At first I could see nothing. Then my vision cleared. Still I could see nothing— though the room wasn't dark."

"What!"

"Nothing, I tell you. No room, no walls, no furniture; only whichever way I looked, emptiness. I had leapt from bed in my first waking moments and couldn't find it again. I walked and walked, I tell you, and ran and ran; but the bed had disappeared, the room had disappeared. It was like a nightmare. I tried to wake up. I was on my hands and knees, crawling, when someone shouted my name. I crawled toward the sound of that voice, and suddenly I was in the hallway above, outside my room door. I dared not look back. I was afraid, I tell you, afraid. I came down the steps."

He paused, wavered. We caught him and eased his body down on a sofa.

"For God's sake," he whispered, "go find my wife."

Jim said soothingly: "There, there, sir, your wife is all right." He motioned me imperatively with his hand. "Go out to our cabin. Bill, and bring me my bag."

I DID as he bade. Jim was a practising physician and never travelled without his professional kit. He dissolved a morphine tablet, filled a hypodermic, and shot its contents into Simpson's arm. In a few minutes, the old man sighed, relaxed, and fell into heavy slumber. "Look," said Jim, pointing.

The soles of Simpson's feet were bruised, bleeding, the pajamas shredded at the knees, the knees lacerated.

"He didn't dream it," muttered Jim at lengtli. "He's been walking and aawling, all right."

We stared at each other. "But, good Lord, man!" I exclaimed.

"I know," said Jim. He straightened up. "There's something strange here. I'm going upstairs. Are you coming?"

Together we mounted to the hall above. I didn't know what we expected to find. I remember wondering if Simpson had done away with his wife and was trying to act crazy. Then I recollected that both Jim and I had observed the damage to the roof. Something had struck the house. Perhaps that something had killed Mrs. Simpson. She was an energetic woman, a few years younger than her husband, and not the sort to be lying quietly abed at such an hour.

Filled with misgivings, we reached the landing above and stared down the corridor. 'The corridor was well lighted by means of a large window at its extreme end. Two rooms opened off this corridor, one on each side. The doors to both were ajar.

The first room into which we glanced was a kind of writing-room and library. I have said that Simpson was no ordinary moxmtaineer. As a matter of fact, he was a man who read widely and kept abreast of the better publications in current literature.

The second room was the bedchamber. Its prosaic door— made of smoothed planks— swung outward. It swung toward us, half open, and in the narrow corridor we had to draw it still further open to pass. Then:

"My God!" said Jim.

Rooted to the floor, we both stared. Never shall I forget the sheer astonishment of that moment. For beyond the door, where a bedroom should have been, there was

"Oh, it's impossible!" I muttered.

I looked away. Yes, I was in a narrow corridor, a house. Then I glanced back, and the effect was that of gazing into the emptiness of illimitable space. My trembling fingers gripped Jim's arm. I am not easily terrified. Men of my

calling— aviation— have to possess steady nerves. Yet there was something so strange so weird about the sight that I confess to a wave of fear. The space stretched away on all sides beyond that door, as space stretches away from one who, lying on his back on a clear day, stares at the sky. But this space was not bright with sunlight. It was a gloomy space, gray, intimidating; a space in which no stars or moon or sun were discernible. And it was a space that had— aside from its gloom— a quality of indirectness....

"Jim," I whispered hoarsely, "do you see it too?"

"Yes, Bill, yes."

"What does it mean?"

"I don't know. An optical illusion, perhaps. Something has upset the perspective in that room."

"Upset?"

"I'm trying to think."

He brooded a moment. Though a practising physician, Jim is interested in physics and higher mathematics. His papers on the relativity theory have appeared in many scientific journals.

"Space," he said, "has no existence aside from matter. You know that. Nor aside from time." He gestured quickly. "There's Einstein's concept of matter being a kink in space, of a universe at once finite and yet infinite. It's all abstruse and hard to grasp." He shook his head. "But in outer space, far beyond the reach of our most powerful telescopes, things may not function exactly as they do on earth. Laws may vary, phenomena the direct opposite of what we are accustomed to may exist."

His voice sank. I stared at him, fascinated.

"And that meteoroid from God knows where!" He paused a moment. "I am positive that this phenomenon we witness is connected with it. Something came to earth in that meteor and has lodged in this room, something possessing alien properties, that is able to distort, warp—" His voice died away.

I stared fearfully through the open door. "Good heavens," I said, "what can it be? What would have the power to create such an illusion?"

"If it is an illusion," muttered Jim.

"Perhaps it is no more an illusion than the environment in which we have our being and which we scarcely question. Don't forget that Simpson wandered through it for hours. Oh, it sounds fantastic, impossible, I know, and at first I believed he was raving; but now... now…"

He straightened abruptly. "Mrs. Simpson is somewhere in that room, in that incredible space, perhaps wandering about, lost, frightened. I'm going in."

I pleaded with him to wait, to reconsider. "If you go. I'll go too," I said.

He loosened my grip. "No, you must stay by the door to guide me with your voice."

D espite my further protestations, he stepped through the doorway. In doing so it seemed that he must fall into an eternity of nothing.

"Jim!" I called fearfully. He glanced back, but whether he heard my voice I could not say. Afterward he said he hadn't.

It was weird to watch him walking— a lone figure in the midst of infinity. I tell you it was the weirdest and most incredible sight the eye of man has ever seen. "I must be asleep, dreaming," I thought; "this can't be real."

I had to glance away, to assure myself by a sight of the hall that I was actually awake. The room at most was only thirty; feet from door to wall; yet Jim went on and on, down an everlasting vista of gray distance, until his figure began to shorten, dwindle. Again I screamed, "Jim! Jim! Come back, Jim!" But in the very moment of my saeaming, his figure flickered, went out, and in all the vast lonely reaches of that gloomy void, nowhere was he to be seen— nowhere!

I wonder if anyone can imagine a tithe of the emotions which swept over me at that moment. I crouched by the doorway to that incredible room, a prey to the most horrible fears and surmises. Anon I called out, "Jim! Jim!" but no voice ever replied, no familiar figure loomed on my sight.

The sun was high overhead when I went heavily down the stairs and out into the open. Simpson was still sleeping on the couch, the sleep of exhaustion. I remembered that he had spoken of hearing our voices calling him as he wandered through gray space, and it came over me as ominous and suggestive of disaster that my voice had, apparently, never reached Jim's ears, that no sound had come to my own ears out of the weird depths.

After the long hours of watching in the narrow corridor, of staring into alien space, it was with an inexpressible feeling of relief, of having escaped something horrible and abnormal, that I greeted the sun-drenched day. The burros were standing with drooping heads in the shade of a live-oak tree. Quite methodically I relieved them of their packs; then I filled and lit my pipe, doing everything slowly, carefully, as if aware of the need for restraint, calmness. On such little things does a man's sanity often depend. And all the time I stared at the house, at the upper portion of it where the uncanny room lay. Certain cracks showed in its walls and the roof above was twisted and tom. I asked myself, how was this thing possible? How, within the narrow confines of a single room, could the phenomenon of infinite space exist? Einstein, Eddington, Jeans— I had read their theories, and Jim might be correct, but the strangeness of it, the horror! You're mad. Bill, I said to myself, mad, mad! But there were the burros, there was the house. A scarlet tanager soared by, a

hawk wheeled overhead, a covey of ring-necked mountain quail scuttled through tangled brush. No, I wasn't nud, I couldn't be dreaming, and Jim— Jim was somewhere in that accursed room, that distortion out of space, lost, wandering!

IT WAS the most courageous thing I ever did in my life— to re-enter that house, climb those stairs. I had to force myself to do it, for I was desperately afraid and my feet dragged. But Simpson's ranch was in a lonely place, the nearest town or neighbor miles distant. It would take hours to fetch help, and of what use would it be when it did arrive? Besides, Bill needed aid, now, at once.

Though every nerve and fiber of my body rebelled at the thought, I fastened the end of a rope to a nail driven in the hall floor and stepped through the doorway. Instantly I was engulfed by endless space. It was a terrifying sensation. So far as I could see, my feet rested on nothing. Endless distance was below me as well as above. Sick and giddy, I paused and looked back, but the doorway had vanished. Only the coil of rope in my hands, and the heavy pistol in my belt, saved me from giving way to utter panic.

Slowly I paid out the rope as I advanced. At first it stretched into infinity like a sinuous serpent. Then suddenly all but a few yards of it disappeared. Fearfully I tugged at the end in my hands. It .resisted the tug. The rope was still there, even if invisible to my eyes, every inch of it paid out; yet I was no nearer the confines of that room. Standing there with emptiness above, around, below me.

I knew the meaning of utter desolation, of fear and loneliness. This way and that I groped, at the end of my tether. Somewhere Jim must be searching and groping too. "JimJ" I shouted; and miraculously enough, in my very ear it seemed, Jim's voice bellowed, "Bill! Bill! Is that you. Bill?"

"Yes," I almost sobbed. "Where are you, Jim?"

"I don't know. This place has me bewildered. I've been wandering around for hours. Listen, Bill; everything is out of focus here, matter warped, light curved. Can you hear me. Bill?"

"Yes, yes. I'm here too, clinging to the end of a rope that leads to the door. If you could follow the sound of my voice "

"I'm trying to do that. We must be very close to each other. Bill " His voice grew faint, distant.

"Here!" I shouted, "here!"

Far off I heard his voice calling, receding.

"For God's sake, Jim, this way, this way!"

Suddenly the uncanny space appeared to shift, to eddy— I can describe what occurred in no other fashion— and for a moment in remote distance I saw Jim's figure. It was toiling up an endless hill, away from me; up, up; a black dot against an immensity of nothing. Then the dot flickered, went out, and he was gone. Sick with nightmarish horror, I sank to my knees, and even as I did so the realization of another disaster made my heart leap suffocatingly to my throat. In the excitement of trying to attract Jim's attention, I had dropped hold of the rope!

Panic leapt at me, sought to overwhelm me, but I fought it back. Keep calm, I told myself; don't move, don't lose your head; the rope must be lying at your feet. But though I felt carefully on all sides, I could not locate it. I tried to recollect if I had moved from my original position. Probably I had taken a step or two away from it, but in what direction? Hopeless to ask. In that infernal distortion of space and matter, there was nothing by which to determine direction. Yet I did not, I could not, abandon hope. The rope was my only guide to the outer world, the world of normal phenomena and life.

This way and that I searched, wildly, frantically, but to no purpose. At last I forced myself to stand quite still, closing my eyes to shut out the weird void. My brain functioned chaotically. Lost in a thirty-foot room, Jim, myself, and a woman, unable to locate one another— the thing was impossible, incredible. With trembling fingers I took out my pipe, pressed tobacco in the charred bowl and applied a match. Thank God for nicotine! My thoughts flowed more clearly. Incredible or not, here I was, neither mad. nor dreaming. Some quirk of circumstance had permitted Simpson to stagger from the web of illusion, but that quirk had evidently been one in a thousand. Jim and I might go wandering through alien depths until we died of hunger and exhaustion.

I OPENED my eyes. The gray clarity of space— a clarity of subtle indirection— still hemmed me in. Somewhere within a few feet of where I stood— as distance is computed in a three-dimensional world— Jim must be walking or standing. But this space was not three-dimensional. It was a weird dimension from outside the solar system which the mind of man could never hope to understand or grasp. And it was terrifying to reflect that within its depths Jim and I might be separated by thousands of miles and yet be cheek by jowl.

I walked on. I could not stand still for ever. God, I thought, there must be a way out of this horrible place, there must be! Ever and anon I called Jim's name. After a while I glanced at my watch, but it had ceased to run. Every muscle in my body began to ache, and thirst was adding its tortures to those of

the mind. "Jim!" I cried hoarsely, again and again, but silence pressed in on me imtil I felt like screaming.

Conceive of it if you can. Though I walked on matter firm enough to the feet, seemingly space stretched below as well as above. Sometimes I had the illusion of being inverted, of walking head-downward. There was an uncanny sensation of being translated from spot to spot without the need of intermediate action. God! I prayed inwardly, God! I sank to my knees, pressing my hands over my eyes. But of what use was that? Of what use was anything? I staggered to my feet, fighting the deadly fear gnawing at my heart, and forced myself to walk slowly, without haste, counting the steps, one, two, three....

When it was I first noticed the shimmering radiation, I can not say. Like heat radiation it was, only more subtle, like waves of heat rising from an open furnace. I rubbed my eyes, I stared tensely. Yes, waves of energy were being diffused from some invisible source. Far off in the illimitable depths of space I saw them pulsing; but I soon perceived that I was fated— like a satellite fixed in its groove— to travel in a vast circle of which they were the center.

And perhaps in that direction lay the door!

Filled with despair I again sank to my knees, and kneeling I thought drearily, "This is the end, there is no way out," and calmer than I had been for hours — there is a calmness of despair, a fatalistic giving over of struggle— I raised my head and looked apathetically around.

Strange, strange; weird and strange. Could this be real, was I myself? Could an immensity of nothing lie within a thirty-foot radius, be caused by something out of space, something brought by the meteor, something able to distort, warp?

Distort, warp!

With an oath of dawning comprehension I leapt to my feet and glared at the shimmering radiation. Why couldn't I approach it? What strange and invisible force forbade? Was it because the source of this incredible space lay lurking there? Oh, I was mad, I tell you, a little insane, yet withal possessed of a certain coolness and clarity of thought. I drew the heavy pistol from its holster. A phrase of Jim's kept running through my head: Vibration, vibration, everything is varying rates of vibration. Yet for a moment I hesitated. Besides myself, in this incredible space two others were lost, and what if I were to shoot either of them? Better that, I told myself, than to perish without a struggle.

I raised the pistol. The shimmering radiation was something deadly, inimical, the diffusing waves of energy were loathsome tentacles reaching out to slay.

"Damn you," I muttered, "take that— and that!"

I pulled the trigger.

OF WHAT followed I possess but a kaleidoscopic and chaotic memory. The gray void seemed to breathe in and out. Alternately I saw space and room, room and space; and leering at me through the interstices of this bewildering change something indescribably loathsome, something that lurked at the center of a crystal ball my shots had perforated. Through the bullet-holes in this crystal a slow vapor oozed, and as it oozed, the creature inside of the ball struggled and writhed; and as it struggled I had the illusion of being lifted in and out, in and out; into the room, out into empty space. Then suddenly the crystal ball shivered and broke; I heard it break with a tinkling as of glass; the luminous vapor escaped in a swirl, the gray void vanished, and sick and giddy I found myself definitely encompassed by the walls of a room and within a yard of the writhing monstrosity.

As I stood with rooted feet, too dazed to move, the monstrosity reared. I saw it now in all its hideousness. A spidery thing it was, and yet not a spider. Up it feared, up, four feet in the air, its saucerlike eyes goggling out at me, its hairy paws reaching. Sick with terror, I was swept forward into the embrace of the loathsome creature. Then happened that which I can never forget till my dying day, so strange it was, so weird. Imagination, you say, the fantastic thoughts of a temporarily disordered mind. Perhaps, perhaps; but suddenly I seemed to know— know beyond a doubt— that this spiderlike visitant from outer space was an intelligent, reasoning being. Those eyes— they seemed to bore into the innermost recesses of my brain, seemed to establish a species of communication between myself and tlie intelligence back of them. It was not a, malignant intelligence— I realized that— but in comparison to myself something god-like, remote. And yet it was a mortal intelligence. My bullets had shattered its protective covering, had reached to its vulnerable body, and as it held me to itself, it was in the very throes of dissolution. All this I sensed, all this it told me; not through language, but through some subtle process of picture transference which it is hopeless for me to attempt to explain. I seemed to see a gray, weird place where delicate traceries were spun and silver devices shimmered and shone— the habitat of the strange visitant from outer space. Perhaps the receiving-cells of my brain were not developed enough to receive all the impressions it tried to convey.

Nothing was clear, distinct, nothing definite. I had the agonizing consciousness that much was slipping through my brain, uncorrelated, unregistered. But a meteoroid was hurtling through the blackness of space— and I saw that meteoroid. I saw it falling to earth. I saw a portion of it swing clear, aash through the roof of Simpson's house and lodge in the bedroom.

And I saw the strange visitant from outside our universe utilize the incredible power he possessed to distort space, iron out the kinks of nutter in it, veil himself in immensity while studying his alien surroundings.

And then all his expiring emotions seemed to rush over me in a flood and I felt— felt— what he was thinking. He had nude a journey from one star system to another, he bad landed safely on earth, a trillion, trillion light-years distant, but never would he return to his own planet to tell of his success— never, never! All this I seemed to understand, to grasp, in a split second or so, his loneliness and pain, his terrible nostalgia; then the hairy paws relaxed their grip, the hideous body collapsed in on itself, and as I stared at it sprawling on the floor, I was suddenly conscious of Mrs. Simpson crouching, unharmed, in one corner of the room, of Jim standing beside me, clutching my arm.

"Bill," he said hoarsely, "are you hurt.?" And then in a whisper, "What is it? What is it?"

"I don't know," I returned chokingly, "I don't know. But whatever it is, it is dead now— the Distortion out of Space."

And unaccountably I buried my face in my hands and began to weep.

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6: The Philistine: A Story

E. M. Delafield

1890-1943

Harpers Magazine, May 1926

HE WAS rather a stolid little boy, but they did their very best with him.

He had, of course, exactly the same treats as the other children, the same pleasures, the same privileges. His toys and presents were better than theirs, if anything, because his aunt, in her heart of hearts, knew him to be less attractive than her own Cynthia and Jeremy and Diana.

For one thing, Colin wasn't as good-looking as they were, and for another, he was less intelligent. Cynthia, at nine years old, had a vivid, original mind, and the few people— but they were people who really knew— to whom Lady Verulam showed her little poems had seen great promise in them.

Jeremy, a year younger, had thick, tight curls of brown hair all over his head, beautiful, long-lashed brown eyes, and an adorable smile. His manners were perfect. He said things— innocent, naive, irresistible things— about God, and the fairies, and how much he loved his mother.

Lady Verulam's youngest girl, Diana, was precociously intelligent too, with a delightfully extensive and grown-up vocabulary at five years old. She had straight, square-cut bobbed brown hair like Cynthia, but she was lovelier than either of the others, and her eyes were a pure, deep blue, fringed with long, curled black lashes.

All Lady Verulam's artist friends wanted to paint Diana, but only Sir Frederick Lorton, the best known portrait-painter in England, was allowed to do so. The portrait was exhibited at the Royal Academy.

Colin was the only child of Lady Verulam's widowed brother-in-law, and he had been sent home to her from India when his mother died. He had been five years old then, and now he was eight.

He was a dear little boy, and Lady Verulam felt remorsefully that he might have been a *darling* little boy if it hadn't been that Cynthia and Jeremy and Diana unconsciously set such a very high standard of charm and intelligence. Intelligence counted for so very much, in that political-artistic section of society in which the Verulams lived. Most children of wealthy parents could be made tolerably pretty, after all, and if they weren't born with brains and personality they stood little chance of individual distinction.

Not that Colin hadn't got personality.

Lady Verulam, who was President of the Cult of the Children Society, and had written a little book about child-psychology, had studied Colin on his own merits, as it were. And she quite recognized that he had character, and even imagination, of a sort, although when the children were all taken to see "Peter

Pan" and told to clap their hands if they believed in fairies, he was the only one of Lady Verulam's large party who didn't clap.

"But I *don't* believe in them, really," said Colin, rather pale.

"But Tinker-Bell!" protested Jeremy, "She'd have died if we hadn't clapped!"

"And we do believe in fairies," said Cynthia firmly.

"Then it was all right for you to clap," said Colin. "There were enough of you without me."

But afterwards he was very silent for a long while and looked worried.

Lady Verulam saw that and she changed her seat in one of the intervals and came beside him.

"Do you like it, darling?"

"Oh, yes," he said, unusually emphatic. But his face hadn't grown scarlet with excitement, like little Diana's, and he wasn't delightfully, stammeringly enthusiastic, like Jeremy. Presently he asked Lady Verulam in rather a troubled way:

"I wasn't unkind or naughty, was I, not to clap for Tinker Bell?"

"Not at all," she was obliged to answer. "The children were only asked to clap if they believed in fairies."

"I don't really believe in them," Colin said apologetically. "Do you, Aunt Doreen?"

"Shall I tell you a secret?" she answered, bending her charming, smiling face down to his. "I like topretend that I believe in fairies, little Colin."

Anyone of the others would have responded to her whimsical fancy—they'd have understood. But Colin only looked up at her with solemn gray eyes staring rather stupidly out of a puzzled face.

"Do you?" was all he said.

"Oh, belovedest, isn't it marvelous!" said Cynthia, her eyes shining and dancing with sheer rapture.

Well, Colin hadn't got the same capacity for enjoyment, that was all. And even if he'd had it, he wouldn't have been able to express it in words.

He was anordinary child.

"He'll never suffer as much as I'm afraid my darlings will, because he'll never feel as much," said Lady Verulam to the French nursery governess, who had so many certificates of her training as a teacher, and as a student of psychology, and as a hospital nurse, that she was as expensive as a finishing-governess.

"Probably not, Lady Verulam. But I think they do one another good. Cynthia's and Jeremy's enthusiastic ways will help Colin to be less stolid in

time. And in one way, of course, it's a relief that he's not as excitable as they are."

The head-nurse said the same.

Diana before a party or a pantomime was positively ill with excitement sometimes. They never dared to tell her of anything until just before it was going to happen.

But Colin never looked forward to things like that. He lived in the present.

"Such a relief," said Lady Verulam rather wistfully. She couldn't help wondering sometimes what her brother-in-law, Vivian, would think of his only child, when he came home...But Colin's mother, whom she had known well as a girl, had been rather stolid, too.

Every day the children went to play in Kensington Gardens. The little procession came out at the front door of the house in Lowndes Square, and Lady Verulam, who adored her children, watched them from the window of the dining room where she was having breakfast after her ride in the Park.

First the under-nurse and the footman, carefully lifting the smart white perambulator down the steps, then Nurse, in stiff white piqué, carrying the rose-colored silk bundle that was the four-months-old baby, and depositing him carefully among his lacey shawls and pillows, under the silk-fringed summer awning of the pram. Then Diana, adorable in a tiny, skimpy frock of palest lemon color, with lemon-colored streamers falling from her shade hat and sandals on her beautiful little slim brown feet. She was carrying a ridiculous little doll's parasol and walking by herself, just as she always did. There was a certain dainty pride about Diana that never allowed her to accept the nurse's hand. She walked by the side of the pram, erect and exquisite.

After the nursery party, Mademoiselle and the elder children came down the steps. In the gardens, they would all coalesce, but the nursery party always started first.

Lady Verulam, peeping out between the window-boxes of scarlet geraniums and white daisies and the edge of the red-striped sun blind, watched them.

Mademoiselle was neat, efficient, French-looking— from the top of her shiny black straw hat, tipped forward over her black hair, to the black patent-leather belt placed very low down on her short-sleeved black-and-white check frock, and the pointed tips of her buttoned black boots. She was drawing on black kid gloves, that came half-way up her arms.

One on each side of her, were the two little boys. They were dressed alike, in white silk shirts and silk ties, and dark knickerbockers. Neither wore a cap, and Jeremy's thick curls looked burnished in the strong July sunlight. People always turned to look at him and at those wonderful curls.

Colin's hair was quite straight, and it suited him best to have it cut very short. It was of no particular color. Both little boys held themselves very upright, but while Colin was stocky and rather short, Jeremy was tall and slim and beautifully made, like a little statue.

Then Cynthia came out of the house, quick and slender and radiating vitality in every graceful gesture. Her frock and hat were the replica of little Diana's, but instead of the minute, absurd parasol, some heavenly instinct had caused her to take from the big glass bowl in the hall a handful of great mauve sweet peas that looked like butterflies against the pale, soft folds of her frock.

Cynthia's strong, instinctive sense of beauty was a joy to her mother.

She seemed to dance, rather than walk, along the hot pavement, her long, slim brown legs bare to the sun. From the little vivid, glancing gesture of her hands and head, Lady Verulam knew that she was talking. She could even guess what Cynthia was talking about—the party.

They were giving a party the next day on Colin's birthday, just before going down into the country. It was, actually, three years since the Verulams had given a children's party. One thing and another had prevented it.

This was called Colin's party but, as usual, the other children were far more excited about it than he was.

Lady Verulam herself was a tiny bit excited about it because for the first time Royalty— very young Royalty— was to be her guest.

She wanted the party to be a great success.

Smiling, she turned away from the window.

CYNTHIA'S mother had been quite right. The children were talking about the party.

"I'm looking forward to it more than I've ever looked forward to anything in all my life," said Jeremy solemnly. "I think if anything happened to prevent it now I'd die."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't," said Cynthia scornfully. "Besides, nothing could happen to prevent it."

They knew little of disappointments, any of them. They were not allowed to experience disappointments if their mother could possibly prevent it because they were such terribly highly strung children.

"Mademoiselle, may Diana be told about the party yet?"

"She may be told, but she isn't to know which day it is till the last minute," said Mademoiselle, who knew very well that it would be impossible to keep sharp little Diana from the infectious excitement and sense of preparation that had already begun to pervade the house.

So they were able to talk about the party freely when they joined Diana and the nurses.

Cynthia did not want to talk about anything else, and the others always followed her lead. Except sometimes Colin, who was what Nurse called "independent."

He was independent to-day, and when he grew tired of hearing Cynthia and Jeremy discuss what games they would play at the party, and Diana chatter about her new frock with the roses on it, he got up and went away and bounced his ball on the Broad Walk.

He was pleased about the party, and Aunt Doreen had allowed him to choose what the entertainment should be, and he had chosen a conjuror, and she had said thatperhaps he would have a cable from Daddy, like last year, for his birthday— but Colin didn't feel that he could think, and talk, and plan about nothing but the party, like the others.

Mademoiselle often said that he had no imagination, and Colin felt sure that she was right. He wasn't certain that he even wanted to have an imagination, much. He knew that he was stupid, compared with Jeremy and Cynthia, but at least he didn't have crying fits— like a girl— as Jeremy occasionally had, and he didn't stammer from pure eagerness as Cynthia did when she got excited.

He did hope, very much, that there might be a cable from Daddy on his birthday, because that would be something of his very own. No one would be able to say that the others cared more than he did, because it wouldn't have anything at all to do with the others.

Feeling rather mean but not able to help it, Colin secretly wished that the others mightn't know anything at all about his cable if it did come. Then they couldn't exclaim and be excited and say things and make Colin feel— and look— stupider than ever.

On the way home he was very silent, trying to think of a plan by which he could prevent the other children from seeing his cable. Perhaps they'd be so busy getting ready for the party that they wouldn't remember about it.

When the next day came it really seemed as though it might be so.

The children flew up and down stairs, even down into the kitchen where the good-natured chef showed them the cakes, and the jellies and the pink and white creams, and dishes of colored sweets, and an amusing log made out of of chocolate with chopped-up green stuff all over it and cream inside it.

They ran into the dining room, too, and saw the long, decorated table and the rows of little gilt chairs.

"There are other chairs in the drawing-room— millions more of them, for the conjuror," said Diana.

"Let's go up there."

"Let's," said Cynthia and Jeremy.

They dashed off.

Colin was just going to follow when he looked out of the window. He had been looking out of the window at intervals all day long.

But this time a telegraph boy really was crossing the square and glancing up at the numbers. It must, surely, be Daddy's cable, and he could take it himself and open it and there'd be nobody there to say that he didn't seem to care half as much as Master Jeremy, not if it were his own father...

Colin, for once moving quickly, ran out to the hall and opened the front door before the boy could ring the bell.

"Is it a foreign telegram— a cable?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, addressed Verulam."

"Then it's mine," said Colin with decision. "There isn't any answer."

He had often heard this said and felt sure it was right.

The telegraph boy, whistling, went away.

Colin retreated to the linen cupboard on the schoolroom landing which was large and light, and to which people seldom came, and sat down on the floor to decipher his birthday cable.

Regret inform you Major Vivian Verulam dangerously ill cholera will cable progress.

Colin's face slowly became pink and then the color ebbed away again and left him rather white. He sat on the floor of the linen cupboard for a long while, not moving.

If Aunt Doreen knew about the cable, the party would have to be stopped, surely. And Diana would cry herself ill, and everybody would be in a dreadful state, and what would happen to all those beautiful cakes? Probably they would be vexed with him, too, for having opened the telegram.

Colin's mind, his slowly moving, tenacious mind, had not yet begun to work on the exact meaning of "dangerously ill." For days he had heard of nothing but the party, and the party had become the alpha and omega of existence.

It was impossible that it should be stopped. "If no one knows but me," thought Colin, "it'll be all right."

He had a horrible feeling that it would be naughty to say nothing about the cable, and yet he felt that they would all blame him if he told about it and stopped the party. Nothing mattered, really, except the party. They had thought he didn't understand what a great event it was because he couldn't

get excited like the others, but at least he could see how very important they all thought it.

Presently he stuffed the cable into the pocket of his breeches, rose slowly and carefully to his feet, and went into the schoolroom again.

THE BRILLIANT, successful party was over, the gilt chairs were stacked together, seat upon seat, ready to be taken away again, and the children— each one with a beautiful present— had all long since gone home.

Cynthia and Jeremy and Colin and Diana had been put to bed. Jeremy had said, "Thank you, you darling, beautiful Mummie, for such a lovely, glittering party."

His choice of words was always fantastic and charming.

Even Colin had hugged his aunt with unusual enthusiasm and said he'd never enjoyed any party so much.

"No wonder," said Mademoiselle to Nurse, with whom she was on friendly terms.

"That conjuror was good, wasn't he?" said Nurse. "The best in London, they say. I never saw anything like him, myself. Why,I couldn't have told how he got those toys into the box with the flags."

"If you please, Nurse," said the under-nurse, entering with her hands full of little garments, "I found this in Master Colin's pocket."

She put the crumpled telegram, in its torn envelope, into Nurse's hands.

Nurse put on her spectacles and read it and said, "What in the name of gracious—" and handed the telegram to Mademoiselle.

There was a knock at the door and the housemaid came in.

"If you please, Nurse, her Ladyship wishes to see you in the boudoir at once."

"Take this," said Mademoiselle, with presence of mind and gave back the telegram.

In the boudoir Lady Verulam sat with another telegram open in front of her. Her pretty face was pale and tearstained.

"Nurse, I'm afraid there's bad news from India. Master Colin— poor little boy— his father is very ill, I'm afraid. I don't quite understand, but we think—"

"I beg your pardon, my lady. Is it anything to do with this? Florence found it, opened like that, in the pocket of Master Colin's every-day pair of knickerbockers."

Lady Verulam read the cable, read it again, compared it with the one she held, and turned bewildered, almost frightened eyes upon the nurse.

"But this one must have come before the other one— the one I've got," she said. "Who opened it?"

"Master Colin must have done it, my lady. And never said a word—"

"He couldn't have understood."

"Is the news in the second telegram worse, my lady?"

"It says that Major Verulam is getting weaker and we must expect—" she chocked a little. "We didn't understand and Sir Frederick is telephoning now to Whitehall, to see if they can give us any further particulars. But Ican't understand—"

She looked at the crumpled telegram again and again.

"This must have come hours ago— before the party. How *could* he have got hold of it?"

"The children were all over the place, my lady— up and down stairs, watching the men getting things ready. Master Colin might have got to the door and opened it just when the telegram was delivered."

"But it was addressed— oh, oh, poor little boy! It was only addressed to Verulam. He must have thought it was a cable for his birthday— I see— that's what happened— that's why he opened it."

"But, excuse me, my lady, why didn't he say anything to anybody? He's quite old enough to understand."

Nurse was respectfully indignant, but Lady Verulam was only tearful and unspeakably bewildered.

"I must go up to him—"

"I beg your pardon, my lady, he's asleep. They all are now, even Miss Diana, but Master Colin was asleep before any of them, though not being so excitable as the others."

"Then I can't wake him," said Lady Verulam irresolutely. "It would only upset him. And there may be news in the morning— one way or the other."

There was no more news in the morning, however, and Lady Verulam was obliged to send for Colin. She wasn't angry with him— even if his father hadn't been dying, it was against her principles to be angry with any child— but her gentleness met with very little response.

He didn't seem to understand that his father, whom he scarcely remembered, was very ill and might be going to die. His lack of imagination was absolute.

"But why didn't you bring the telegram to me, darling? I quite understand that you opened it by mistake, but you must have known it was important and that you ought to tell about it."

Colin began to cry.

She reasoned with him, and petted him, and even spoke severely to him, but he was sulky and frightened and would not say a word. At last, in despair, she sent him upstairs again.

Ten minutes later Cynthia came flying down to her mother's room, her lovely mop of hair disordered, her brilliant little face glowing. "Mummie, may I tell you what I think about Colin? Nurse doesn't understand— nor Mademoiselle, nor any of them—but I think I do."

"Tell me, precious," said Lady Verulam. She had great faith in the intuition of this sensitive, intelligent little daughter of hers.

Cynthia put her arms round her mother's neck and whispered earnestly.

"I think Colin opened the telegram about poor Uncle Vivian just before the party, and he did understand what it was, and he thought it would spoil the party and p'raps— p'raps put it off altogether, and that's why he wouldn't say anything. He didn't want all of us to be unhappy— he knew we were looking forward so to the party."

"My darling! What makes you think that?"

"It's what I'd have done," said Cynthia, her eyes shining. "I would, truly, Mummie, if my heart had been breaking— I'd have kept that dreadful telegram all to myself and let all the others enjoy the party and even have pretended that I was enjoying it too."

"My sweet— I believe you would. But if that was it, why didn't poor little Colin come to me as soon as the party was over?"

"Mummie, you know you were with the grown-ups who stayed after we'd gone to bed, and I'm sure he was waiting till you came to say good-night. And you never did."

"Nurse said you were all asleep— Colin must have gone quickly off to sleep, after all."

"But, Mummie," said Cynthia quickly, "he's very little, and one can't always keep awake, even if it's most important, and Colin especially, he's always such a sleepy head—"

"I know," said Lady Verulam.

She thought, although she did not say so, that Colin's insensitiveness had always been rather remarkable, and that where Cynthia might, as she had just said, have felt her heart to be "breaking," Colin was quite capable of falling asleep in mere reaction from an unwonted emotional strain.

She was touched at Cynthia's generous understanding and inclined to accept her interpretation.

"Poor little Colin!" she said softly. "It was brave and unselfish of him to want everyone else to enjoy the party first... although it was a mistake, and I still don't understand why he couldn't explain to me this morning."

"Mummie, you know Colin never can explain anything," said Cynthia reproachfully.

That was perfectly true. How clever she was! Lady Verulam kissed Cynthia in silence. In her heart of hearts she couldn't help feeling that, dreadful though it was to have been entertaining on such a scale while her brother-in-law was dying, it would have been very, very difficult to know what to do if the bad news had reached her when it should have reached her, just as the preparations for the party were being completed.

"You do understand about Colin, don't you, Mummie? Because Mademoiselle isn't being a bit nice to him, and she says he has no heart and that he didn't show the telegram because he didn't want the party to be stopped, and then afterwards he was afraid to tell."

"I'll speak to her," said Lady Verulam. Mademoiselle was always inclined to be hard on Colin. She couldn't bear what she called his phleqme britannique. Lady Verulam did not for a moment believe her interpretation to be the true one. She would sooner trust to Cynthia's quick sympathies.

According to Cynthia, little Colin had really been rather heroic. He must have had a dreadful weight on his little mind, all through the festivities...

Tender-hearted Lady Verulam found the tears rising into her eyes at the thought of it. She felt as though she had always been unjust to Colin, who had so little imagination, and couldn't express himself with fire and poetry and clearness like her own children. And now perhaps she had alienated him by not understanding or appreciating his self-sacrifice, and he would be less willing than ever to talk to her.

Before she saw Colin again a third cable had arrived.

Major Vivian Verulam was not going to die. He had turned the corner.

The joy and relief of the good news pervaded the house, and even Mademoiselle kissed Colin— who rubbed his cheek vigorously after the salute— and said nothing more about his having no heart. But Lady Verulam, who, like her children, was highly strung, had worked herself up on Colin's behalf, and she told Mademoiselle and Nurse as well that they had all of them misunderstood Colin, and that there were unsuspected depths of bravery and unselfishness in his childish heart.

There came, gradually, to be a feeling throughout the big household in Lowndes Square that this was so. Colin might be less wonderful than were Cynthia and Jeremy and Diana, but he, too, had had his moment—his exalted and inspired moment.

THREE months later Major Verulam came home on sick leave.

He made friends with his son— an enduring friendship. They resembled each other in many ways, and he never seemed to expect or to desire from Colin enthusiasms and demonstrations that would have been equally alien to them both.

He was, indeed, the only person who ever heard Colin's own version of his behavior on the day of the party.

"You see, Daddy, I opened the telegram because I thought it was from you, for me on my birthday, like the year before, and when I saw it said you were ill I did think it would mean stopping the party, and that would have been dreadful."

"Were you so frightfully keen about the party?"

"It wasn't so much that, but there'd have been such a lot of fuss about it, and they— all the others— had been so excited— and everything was ready— men had come all on purpose to bring the little gold chairs, Daddy, and to arrange the flowers and things— It would have been so dreadful, to stop it all."

"I see what you mean. And certainly it wouldn't have done *me* any good, as far as that went. But why didn't you tell them afterwards, old man? Aunt Doreen wouldn't have been angry with you, would she?"

"Oh, no, she's never angry."

"Well, then—"

Colin colored faintly.

"You see, Daddy, I didn't know you as well then as I do now, did I? And the party was fun, and the conjuror such a very, very clever one."

He gazed up at his father with solemn, trustful eyes.

"I quite and completely forgot all about the telegram till I woke up next morning," said Colin.

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7: The Barman's Story

V. J. Daley

Victor James Daley, 1858–1905

The Bulletin, 26 Dec 1912

Ireland-born Australian poet, writer and journalist. This is a reprint from an earlier issue of The Bulletin*, but I cannot find the original.*

"DIRTY DICK'S place," said the handsome barman, "was really a cellar— or a series of cellars. It was spotlessly clean for the first few years; and he made his reputation— his nickname came afterwards— by selling the best wines and spirits to be found in London. Everybody of any account has been, at one time or another, a patron of Dirty Dick. Royalty has taken a drink and smoked a cigar in his cellar. If he had been the kind of man who cared for such things he might have owned the best, or, at any rate, the most characteristic autograph album in Europe. He had a curious fad which every customer respected. You might take a friend in with you and have what you required. But if your friend asked you to have Another with him he would meet with a polite refusal. Dick was an artist and a connoisseur, and he seemed to think that anybody who had taken a drink in his cellar should go forth and turn the drink over upon his palate, and meditate upon it, and thank God that there was still such good liquor to be had in the world, instead of swilling it down and calling for more as though it had been common beer. But you could go out by the front way and come in by the back almost as often as you chose. He did a great trade. And if you had not been at Dirty Dick's you had not seen London.

"Well, he made up his mind to get married. They said she was a very pretty woman. Anyhow, he fitted up a suite of rooms for her in a most elegant fashion. He owned the whole building, although he conducted his business in the cellars. She was killed in a collision on the way back from the church on her wedding day. The famous inn was shut up for two days. Then Dick opened it again, but the rooms he had fitted up for her were kept locked up. Nobody ever entered them. They were the habitations of spiders. Gradually the spiders made their way into the cellars and spun their webs all over the place. Dick would not permit them to be touched. They were sacred. If a spider dropped into your glass he would fill up another for you, and carefully rescue the spider. All of his customers humored his fancy, and his trade became greater than ever. I've seen members of Parliament and prominent merchants with tall silk hats duck their heads as they came inside the door for fear they should break or disturb the sacred spider-web curtain that hung across it. And that was how he came to be called Dirty Dick.

"I don't know what was the end of him. I had an engagement in Hamburg for six months, and when I returned to London Dirty Dick and Dirty Dick's sacred cob-webs and Dirty Dick's house had vanished. In its place was a fine new spick and span hotel called 'Dirty Dick's.' But the custom had vanished also— run away like water out of a sieve. It's always the way," said the barman philosophically, "when a publican, or a grocer, or a draper, or any other kind of tradesman makes a big name in a small house— an or'nery-looking old house 'with the street creeping to its knees— he thinks that it is up to him to keep pace with the times. So he pulls down the good old house that brought him his money and builds a fine large new one of red brick with white tuck-pointings and (if he happen to be a publican) with a beautiful new bar, garish with mirrors, and with never a room or a chair or a bench in it that an old customer can feel comfortable in. His troubles about old customers. Their troubles about him. They go somewhere else to some other comfortable old place where they can sit down and diank and smoke and yarn without of their old coats spoiling the new varnish on the new dadoes or the new counters. I'm talking about hotels now, because I know about hotels, but I've heard that the rule applies in other lines of business. What do you think?"

I WAS quite sure about the matter. There was, some four or five years ago, a grocer's shop in a Sydney suburb. The shop was old and uncomely, perhaps, but solid-looking. It had small, old-fashioned windows, which were so crammed with hams and cheeses, all of the best, that when you went into the shop you found yourself in a rich, spicy twilight out of which emerged a stout man in snowy shirt-sleeves who would ask you in a rich pleasant voice what he could do for you. The man who owned the shop made a fortune in it, and his views expanded. He pulled the old building down gradually and built a new one on the same site. Brass rails and rosewood counters and plate glass windows, through which you could see to the very furthest end of the Academy of Grocery. No mystery, no suggestion of rich possibilities in the shape of Arabian Nights' bargains. Everything plainly ticketed with its price. The hams— or some other hams— were still there, but they hung up high on bright steel hooks, suspended from bright steel chains, attached to bright steel rods that crossed the Wholesale and Retail Lyceum just under its bright blue-steel ceiling. The men behind the counter were also different in their ways from the assistants in the good old beetle-browed unpretentious building. They looked worried and almost wolfish, and the proprietor, who used to have a voice like old Burgundy poured from a cob webbed bottle into a Mura no tumbler, spoke in rasping tones, and had an anxious American hustling air about him that told the whole story without a word being said. The brass-railed, rosewood-countered, plate-

glassed window emporium had turned out a failure. The old customers patronised it no more, except to the extent of sending their little girls or boys for bars of soar), or knobs of blue, or tins of sardines. The grocer's man had gone with the house that had gone. I knew him very well, and he seemed pleased to see me again when I spoke to him.He put his hat and coat on and we went across the road to the hotel.

"By God," he said over his whisky, and shaking his fist at his emporium, "if I could only pull that red-brick Jonah down and build up the old house again what a happy man I would be!"

If we could only reconstruct our lives!

8: Three Dead Camels

William J. Makin

1894-1944

Blue Book, April 1933

THEY lay on the hard, gritty surface of the desert, three mangy yellow heaps with long legs sprawled absurdly. A vulture, like some obscene sentry, had perched itself on a sand ridge near by. Lazily it spread its wings, blinked an eye, and settled down again to that watchful posture.

The afternoon sun beat down upon the three dead camels. No breeze stirred the loose sand. The pale blue silk of the sky seemed stretched so tightly that a knife would slit it apart. The yellow landscape was as dead as those three heaps on its surface. Only the vulture was alive.

Suddenly the vulture cocked its head in the attitude of a human being, listening. Away in the distance came a low droning sound. The sound approached with the swiftness of a desert storm. The droning grew into a roar. With a squawk of fear the vulture flapped its wings and rose in the air.

The sun glinted against something in that pale blue sky. The roar became a torrent of noise. A British military airplane banked, then swooped low over the three dead camels. The next moment it had landed, turned round and taxied toward them. Then the engine was switched off while a leather-helmeted figure jumped out from the cockpit.

He stood regarding the three dead camels. As though puzzled by this strange sight he pulled the leather helmet from his head, revealing a flaming crop of red hair. The pilot of the plane had also jumped out of the machine and now strode forward to join his companion.

"By Jove, Rodgers, you were right," cried the pilot. "How you came to spot these dead camels against the sand I can't imagine. You ought to join the corps as an observer."

Paul Rodgers— an Intelligence officer frequently referred to by the natives as the Wolf of Arabia— smiled slightly.

"It was good of you to give me a jaunt, anyhow," he said. "Flying over the desert is much more exhilarating than riding across it."

While he spoke his gray eyes were searching the loose sand in the vicinity.

"Well, what d'you think of these three dead camels, now that we've risked our necks landing in this God-forsaken spot?" asked the pilot. "I don't find the sight particularly edifying."

"Neither do I, my dear Wicks," admitted Paul Rodgers. "But three dead camels in the desert present a very interesting problem."

"Why? I suppose camels must die," said Flight Lieutenant Wicks bluntly. "And I admit that I wouldn't like to dig a grave for the beasts in this wilderness."

"Exactly," Rodgers agreed smoothly. "Neither would an Arab. But why? Because a dead camel is still worth something to him. The flesh would provide more than threé days' food, the hide is worth keeping, and even its belly, if split open, would provide him another day's water-supply. None of these things have been done to these three camels. Their throats have been cut; then the Arabs rode on. Why?"

"Blest if I know! Why worry about it?"

"Just because I'm curious," muttered Rodgers. He walked on a few yards, and bent down to gaze at the sand. Then he returned and eyed the camels speculatively. He began to speak as though thinking aloud.

"They were in a hurry. Two Arabs with four camels— racing camels. Why *four* camels? They must have been carrying something precious in addition to themselves."

"And why in a hurry?" interrupted Flight Lieutenant Wicks.

RODGERS looked up; his gray eyes twinkled.

"The spoor in the sand tells me a lot," he said, "but not everything. These camels have been ridden to death; they are as lean and scraggy as beasts that have been ridden through hell."

"They say hell lies beyond there!" nodded the aviator, his sun-wrinkled gaze fixed on the far horizon.

"The two men riding three camels alternately— and trailing a fourth— must have gone on night and day over the desert," mused Rodgers aloud. "The riders changed from beast to beast. But here, at this spot, one of the camels stuck in the sand and refused to go farther. It dropped from sheer exhaustion. And camels can be more obstinate than mules."

"So I've heard," Wicks grinned. "Give me a Camel of the Sky every time! But what makes you think these fellows were in a hurry?"

"Ordinarily," Paul Rodgers replied, "Arabs would accept the obstinacy of this camel as the will of Allah. They would have settled down with the rest of their beasts and camped until all were rested. It is related in the *Koran* that when Mahomet entered Medina on the back of his favorite camel, he told the welcoming people, all of whom wanted to shelter the holy man, that wheresoever his camel stopped, there would he stay. The beast nosed its way into the yard of two brothers, and they had the honor of serving the Prophet."

Wicks yawned, and lit a cigarette.

"But these two Arabs refused to stop where their failing camel stopped. They tried to lash the beast into action again. You can see the marks on its hide. It refused to move. At the same time, these two other camels knelt in the sand. They had been set a bad example— mutiny, if you like, among the beasts."

"It must have been rather comic," said Wicks.

"It must have been deadly serious," Rodgers retorted. "For the Arabs were desperate enough to murder their beasts— these three obstinate camels— rather than stay a scant hour or two resting in the desert."

"But why the hurry ?" persisted Wicks.

"Probably they were being pursued. Perhaps a Bedouin tribe was after them, ready to slit the throats of the two Arabs for the treasure they carried. And here, within fifty miles of Aden, three of the camels broke down. Only fifty more miles to safety, with still one camel left. If they had not been in such a desperate hurry, they would never have killed and abandoned three valuable carcasses."

And Rodgers laughed at his own deductions. Wicks also laughed, but his eyes turned toward the sky a trifle impatiently.

"I say, Rodgers," he remarked, "we'll also have to hurry! The sun is going down, and I feel like having a whisky and soda. Let's flip back to Aden."

"Right you are, old fellow."

The Intelligence officer walked with the pilot toward the plane. While Wicks was coaxing the machine into action, he turned and eyed those camels once again. Then something caught his eye. He walked back and picked something out of the sand; it looked like a pebble. It rested in the palm of his hand for a moment. Then he dropped it carelessly into his pocket.

"Queer!" he muttered.

But there came a warning shout from Wicks, and Rodgers slipped quickly into the cockpit. A roar from the unthrottled engine followed, the plane began to race across the desert, and the next moment was droning skyward again.

As that droning sound receded in the distance there was a flapping of wings and the vulture swooped back to its watching position on the sand ridge. It blinked one eye at the setting sun...

"MY DEAR FELLOW, I can't stand it any longer. You're mad, and you're driving me mad!"

The pilot Wicks banged his empty glass on the table as he spoke. Paul Rodgers, seated before the piano in the R.A.F. mess, looked up in surprise.

"Mad? I don't understand."

Wicks, a grin on his handsome face, lounged over to the piano.

"Do you realize, Rodgers, what you've been playing with maddening reiteration for the past half-hour?"

The Intelligence officer's fingers slipped from the keyboard.

"No."

"*Three Blind Mice*.... *Three Blind Mice*. Just imagine!"

Rodgers laughed spontaneously.

"Not a bad theme, anyhow; Beethoven improvised wonderfully on it. *Three Blind Mice*. Well, it's a reflection of the idea that has been in my head all evening."

"What is that?"

"Three dead camels," replied Rodgers solemnly.

"Then you are mad," commented Wicks, with equal solemnity. "Why worry about three dead camels?"

"Who is worrying about three dead camels?" came a gruff voice from the beaded curtain of the doorway. A fattish man in a white drill suit lounged into the mess-room and flung his topee wearily on a cane couch. Paul Rodgers and Wicks recognized the chief of police, Captain Johnson.

"Hello, Johnson! Have a drink?" suggested Wicks.

"That's what I've come for," replied the chief of police. "A burra peg."

"Rodgers here is crazy about camels— three dead camels," explained Wicks, signaling for more drinks.

"Well, he might have been a little more crazy if he'd seen what I've just seen," growled the chief of police.

"What's that, Johnson?" asked Wicks.

"Two dead Arabs, hanging by their necks in a dirty little house in Arabtown," was the reply. '"Cheerio, everybody!" the chief of police concluded, raising his glass and gulping it at one draught.

Rodgers lit a cigarette and regarded the fat figure in the white drill suit through thoughtful gray eyes.

"That's interesting, Johnson," he said quietly. "Have you got the murderers?"

"Not a sign of 'em," replied Johnson. "They've left no tracks. Some bloodfeud, I suppose."

"Arabs don't hang each other in blood-feuds," commented Rodgers. "Wasn't it robbery?"

Johnson scowled, and held out his empty glass to be replenished.

"Not a thing in the house worth stealing. They only seemed to possess one camel between them. A scraggy beast, too— we found it with its belly slit, in the yard at the back of the house."

"And the camel was lame in the off hind leg," suggested Rodgers.

"So the tracker said," growled Johnson. Then he looked up in surprise. "But I didn't tell you that!"

Rodgers shook his head and smiled.

"No, I rather guessed it. Another thing, Johnson: Those two fellows whom you found hanging by the neck came into Aden only last night, didn't they?"

The chief of police put down his glass.

"Look here," he growled. '"Who's been spilling the story of this murder all over the place?"

"First I've heard of it," said Wicks.

"And you, Rodgers?" asked Johnson.

"I've been with Wicks all day," replied the Intelligence officer, "and he'll tell you that nobody but yourself has talked to us of murder."

"Well, it's damned good guessing on your part," said Johnson. "Yes, the fellows only arrived last night."

"What's their tribe?" Rodgers asked.

"They've come out of the blue," replied the chief of police. "From the Rub 'al Khali."

THE Rub 'al Khali was the romantic wilderness of Arabia— a region of shifting sands, of lost oases, and buried cities. The land-blank area on the maps of the world. Only three white men had entered it: Bertram Thomas had raced across that desert with relays of camels. St. John Philby had spent three months in it. Paul Rodgers had once lost himself in its singing sands. The Rub 'al Khali was still a mystery desert.

"Probably the murderers came from the Rub 'al Khali and are now racing back to it," growled Johnson. "One might as well search for a pebble flung into the middle of the Indian Ocean as for an Arab murderer in that desert."

Rodgers nodded.

"Talking of a pebble, I'm interested in your two dead Arabs, Johnson," he said. "You're certain robbery wasn't the motive of the murder?"

"Might have been. But the room was bare of anything."

"Not even a pebble?" Rodgers prodded.

"Why the devil should Arabs collect pebbles?" snarled Johnson. "It's food they wanted, judging by their bodies— not stones."

"What have you done with the bodies?"

"I suppose they're being buried at this moment," replied the chief of police. "I had them taken to Headquarters and—"

He stopped; Rodgers had gripped him by the arm.

"Johnson, I'd like very much to see those fellows before they are put under the sand. Can't we go along now?"

"This is a damned morbid idea," growled Johnson. "In any case, I expect we'd be too late."

"We can be there in ten minutes."

There was something curt and commanding in Rodgers' voice. Captain

Johnson eyed him uneasily. He was always uneasy where Rodgers was concerned; the fellow had an uncanny knack of mixing himself with high official matters. They said this red-haired fanatic knew more about Arabia than the Arabs themselves. And high officialdom was always behind him.

"Oh, well," he said wearily, "— if you must."

The chief of police drove in sulky silence to the squat brown building which constituted his headquarters. A khakiuniformed guard presented arms as they entered. Johnson strode into his office, where a Babu clerk rose from behind a desk with an oily smile.

"Have they buried those two Arabs yet?" the chief snapped.

"Nearly, sahib," replied the clerk. "Very nearly."

"That means they haven't," grinned Rodgers. "Lead on, Johnson!"

They passed through a doorway, across a courtyard, and entered a clay building with a rickety door. They were followed by a tall bearded Sikh in khaki uniform, guard of this little mortuary in the tropics.

"Not an edifying sight, eh?" mutmured Johnson.

Rodgers did not reply. He had doffed his topee, and with a lock of fiery hair dangling over one eye, he regarded the two figures stretched before him. They were half naked; from the waists of their brown bodies stretched the indigo skirts worn by the men of the Rub 'al Khali, and from beneath those skirts the dusty feet of the Arabs stuck out incongruously.

"Was anything found on the bodies?" he asked.

"Not a damned thing," replied Johnson. "They were as poor as sand rats."

Rodgers nodded, and eyed the bodies more closely. Then, to the astonishment of the chief of police, he hooked a finger in the waist of one of those skirts and stretched it away from the body.

"See that scar, Johnson?" he said quietly.

With a little grunt of disgust, Captain Johnson bent over the body.

"Yes," he nodded. "Looks like a knife-wound, recently healed. Probably the fellow was in a fight."

Paul Rodgers shook his head.

"When Arabs fight with knives," he said briefly, "they go for the heart—or the throat. No, this fellow wounded himself."

"D'you mean to say that the Arab deliberately stuck a knife in his own thigh?"

Rodgers, without replying, turned to the statuesque Sikh in the doorway.

"Give me your knife!" he ordered in Hindustani.

"My fellows don't carry knives— only rifles and bayonets," Johnson growled.

"Your knife!" commanded Rodgers, even more curtly.

"*Aatcha*, sahib," replied the Sikh, and with the swiftness of a conjurer he produced a gleaming blade from his khaki uniform.

"Good! Now get outside and see that we are not disturbed," ordered Rodgers.

"Yes, sahib." The Sikh saluted, and turned his back on the two bodies and the two white men.

"How did you guess that fellow had a knife secreted on him?" Johnson asked.

Rodgers did not reply. He was testing the edge of the blade. "It's sharp enough," he muttered. Then he strode toward the bodies, knife in hand.

"Good heavens, Rodgers, what are you going to do?" gasped Johnson.

"Just a little post-mortem," Rodgers said, hooking his finger once again in that indigo skirt. "But I can't allow this."

"You've got to allow it," said the Intelligence officer briefly, as he bent down over the dead Arab.

He made two deep incisions. Sickened but fascinated, Johnson watched. He saw the slim fingers insert themselves into the wound, and a moment later they emerged holding something between them that glittered strangely in the dim light.

"I thought so," murmured Rodgers half to himself.

"What is it?" Johnson asked.

"A diamond— and worth a small fortune," said Rodgers. "It's something the murderers missed when they hanged these two Arabs. This fellow knew that the safest place to hide treasure was in one's own body. It's an old trick of diamond-thieves. But the murderers forgot it."

"So these two Arabs were robbers?"

"In a way, yes." Rodgers was still musing over the rough uncut stone which he held in the palm of his hand.

"But who possesses diamonds in that God-forsaken desert?" insisted Johnson.

Rodgers smiled.

"Ever heard of Ophir?" he asked.

"Ophir! Isn't that supposed to be the treasure-house of the Queen of Sheba?"

Rodgers nodded.

"The old Arab writers insist that the land of Ophir is hidden in the Rub 'al Khali— rich mines smothered in sand."

"Well?"

"Maybe these two men come from Ophir," said Rodgers quietly; "and this diamond is part of the treasure that they brought with them. —Have a cigarette?"

Johnson produced his case. "And what now?" he asked.

Rodgers blew a little cloud of smoke into the air.

"I should see that those two fellows are buried at once," he murmured, and with a nod he strode out of the clay house. The Sikh policeman saluted him smartly.

Only when Rodgers had crossed the courtyard and disappeared, did Captain Johnson realize that the diamond also had disappeared.

THE stillness of the evening had descended upon Aden; only that eternal shuffling of naked feet in sand continued. Seated on the veranda of a hotel, bathed in electric light, Paul Rodgers sensed that movement in the darkness beyond, as a sailor senses the murmur of the sea. Pad— pad— pad. It was the sound of men prowling like beasts beneath the glittering stars that covered this extinct volcano known as Aden.

Paul Rodgers was in white evening dress, a black cummerbund about his waist; his red hair was smooth and glossy beneath the electric light. Above the smoke of his cigarette his gray eyes were narrowed in thought. Occasionally he sipped from the little cup of coffee at his elbow.

Before him, on the table, was a sheet of paper with some lines of typewriting upon it. He scanned it for the twentieth time. It was a list, an incongruous list. It read:

8 motor cars (six-cylinder type)
2 gold-framed portraits of Napoleon
1 pair brown boots (size 10)
1 pair spats
1 gold-knobbed malacca cane
5 life-guards' uniforms
50 cases of cigars
4 mechanical pianos

"Yes, a queer collection," muttered Rodgers to himself. "But also very illuminating." And then with a faint smile he read the note at the end of the itemized list:

This, as per your instructions, is the most complete list we have been able to obtain of goods landed at this port within the past three months, F.O.B. for use by H. H. Sheik Abdulla Marabout, and conveyed to him at his camp in the desert. The total cost would be about £10,000.

Your obedient servant,
Sharmaki Ali
Customs—Mokalla Port.

"EXCELLENT information," Rodgers mused. "The two portraits of Napoleon are significant. Sheik Abdulla Marabout is becoming ambitious! Vanity, too, is suggested by the spats and the malacca cane. But where has the money come from? Ten thousand pounds! Few sheiks accumulate as much as that in a lifetime. But this information comes at an interesting moment. Can I fit it into this strange jig-saw puzzle? Do the five life-guards' uniforms go with three dead camels— and now two dead Arabs?" The smoke of his cigarette swathed the keen, sunburned features. The eternal shuffle of feet in sand continued.... It forced itself into the consciousness of Rodgers as a blind Arab beggar squatted in the sand below the veranda. His sightless eyes and scarified face gazed up at the man in white evening dress. He whined dismally for alms and presented a dirty paw.

"Alms, O Master!"

Still keeping his eyes fixed on that sheet of paper, Rodgers fumbled in his pocket and dropped some coins—one ....two.... three— in playfully methodical fashion into the outstretched palm.

"May Allah protect you!" whined the blind beggar.

"And open your— ears," murmured the other incongruously.

The blind man half rose, shuffling in the sand.

"I have news," he muttered.

"Tell it in whispers," said Rodgers in soft Arabic.

"It is as you guessed, Master," continued the blind man. "She has been seen in Aden. Her name has been whispered. That name has been carried like grains of sand by the desert wind— the Woman of Antioch."

"So!"

The face of Rodgers twitched. Excitement burned within him. Once again that strange woman of the East was crossing his path. It seemed that Fate was determined their terrible enmity should not be allowed to fall into the limbo of forgetfulness.

The Woman of Antioch! Again and again, when the Wolf of Arabia came to grips with that strange underworld of yellow, brown and black stretching from Alexandria to Cape Guardafui,— the whole length of the Red Sea region,— he discovered that this strange woman was the sinister genius behind the scenes. And again and again he had thwarted her plans... .

"It is well," he murmured exultantly.

But rage distorted the features of the man crouched at his feet.

"May the thousand and one tortures rack her body," he cried. "May the goats suck her blood until she swoons with the pain. May her screams ring through the empty desert. May—"

"Softly, softly, Amin Yusuf!" replied Rodgers. "Why must a blind man babble so loudly? There are ears everywhere."

"Yes— and eyes," snarled the beggar. "Eyes that see! Allah gave me eyes to see— and with laughter on her cruel face the Woman of Antioch ordered them to be torn from me! I had failed; she had no further use for me. She made of me the poor thing I am today. The last thing I saw with my eyes was her gloating face. Then only my ears heard her laughter. Some day I shall hear that laughter change to a scream of fear. Then I shall know that her eyes have glimpsed me."

"Allah teaches us infinite patience," murmured Rodgers. "I, too, am seeking the Woman of Antioch. Give me your news quickly. How long does she stay?"

"She leaves tonight for the Rub 'al Khali, It is a long ride, and she has the finest camels," muttered the blind beggar. "Let us kill her tonight, Master, here in Aden."

RODGERS hesitated. Such a revenge was possible. But there were big forces at work: Rebellion was brewing— and there were the mines of Ophir. He sighed and shook his head.

"Let the mother jackal slink back to her whelps," he said. "The kill will be bigger for waiting."

"Her camels move fast," warned the beggar.

"But camels leave tracks in the sand," said Rodgers. "It will be easy to follow her."

"I am blind," sighed the crouching man.

"But worth two men with eyes," Rodgers observed. "Already you have helped me much. And now go you to the camel-market and buy me two beasts that are wiry and can travel fast. We also, my friend, will ride into the Rub 'al Khali."

"I ask nothing more, Master," whispered the beggar. "My hands can buy a camel better than the eyes of other men." The scarred face seemed transformed. "May Allah give us our desires."

"*Imshi*! Go to the devil!" cried Rodgers aloud in English— and the beggar cringed away.

So another piece had fitted into the jig-saw puzzle. The Woman of Antioch. Was it all a series of coincidences? Anyhow, the pieces fitted. Beyond lay the desert— and in that desert Rodgers knew that he and the Woman of Antioch must settle accounts.

A strange woman. A vision of her glowing dark eyes and her parte voluptuous lips appeared before him. A pale, yet exotic face. She was a Syrian, with all the seductive appeal of her race. But how describe her?...

The Woman of Antioch, as she was known to the blackguards of the Middle East who worshiped her, was dangerous. Her one aim seemed the overthrow of European influences east of Suez, and that aim had become a fanatical monomania with her. All her days and nights were devoted to the cause. And where was the source of her fortunes? Antioch? That town could not keep a revolt going for a week! And sheiks were buying motorcars and mechanical pianos. They had been well bribed. That treasure-house must be in the Rub 'al Khali— Ophir— the mines that had sweated forth the treasure for the Queen of Sheba, and later lost in the sands, were now providing treasure for the Woman of Antioch, Two Arabs had looted those mines, With a chest filled with precious stones, and four camels, they had galloped into the mirages and singin sands of the Rub 'al Khali. They ha been pursued; the Woman of Antioch had realized that these two blunderers would disclose the source of her wealth.

Well— Rodgers gazed down at two pebbles glittering dully in his palm. One was the diamond discovered in the desert. The other he had taken from the wound in the dead man.

"A dead man and a blind beggar shall be my allies against you," he whispered to that strange vision of dark glowing eyes and voluptuous lips, that hovered in the darkness.

Idly he lit another cigarette.

THEY were in the desert. For ten days Rodgers and the beggar had urged their camels into that sea of sand known as the Rub 'al Khali. A blaze of stars at night, a brassy dome in the day. ridge of sand climbing toward the sky. Their camels topped it, and with a faint whimper slid into the trough beyond. Not a sound broke the awful silence of that desert. It was the stillness of death. "This

is the tenth day, Master," muttered the blind beggar. "How near are we to them?"

"They are one day's march ahead," replied Rodgers. "You must be patient, Amin Yusuf."

Wrapped in a burnous, and mounted on a scraggy camel, Rodgers had eyes only for the sand. He was reading the tracks with all the cunning of an Arab. Those little hollows that went over the dunes and beyond had become familiar to him. He seemed to know intimately the three men and the woman whom they were pursuing. He blessed the stillness that had brought no wind sweeping away the tracks in the sand.

The four were traveling fast. That was apparent from the signs. Rodgers had noted that the impressions of each camel were level. The curved line of the near forefoot was alongside the straighter line of the off hind foot. That meant they were traveling at least seven miles an hour. This was good. going, for the desert, where few Arabs traveled faster than three miles an hour.

On the second day Rodgers had seen the impression of the Woman of Antioch. It stood out from the other tracks at an oasis— the stride shorter. He exulted at the sight. The account between Rodgers and the Woman of Antioch would soon be settled! When he had first glimpsed that sign, he had urged his camel forward. Then on second thoughts he curbed it. He knew that at the end of each day's march one of that party of four would go back for an hour in their tracks and scan the desert behind them to make sure that they were not pursued.

Those ten days of riding in the desert had demanded every ounce of endurance that Rodgers possessed. He had to live like an Arab in the full sense, which meant that he drank a little of his camel's milk every three days,.and nothing more. He and Amin Yusuf lived on a scanty ration of rice and dates. A strange couple they made as they squatted in the sand each evening— a blind Arab and a red-haired European!

"So you have kept count of the days, Yusuf?" asked Rodgers.

"I can sense the passing of day better than you with your eyes, Master. And if you will only tell me of the signs in the sand, I will read you more of those whom we pursue."

"Nay, I am no child in sand-reading," replied Rodgers. "I learned in the Bedouin camps."

At the same time he was astounded at the uncanny perception this blind Arab seemed to possess, once they had entered the desert. It was as though those ridges of sand and sunset mirages had cleared the scales from his scarred face. Amin Yusuf rode his camel with confidence. His ragged burnous, more like the shroud of a corpse, wrapped him from head to foot; but there

was a grim tightening of the mouth, a lowering of the head, that suggested a beast nosing the trail.

IT was in one burning, blistering noontime when Rodgers was half dazed with the sight of those endless tracks in the sand, that Amin Yusuf raised his head and sniffed the desert air.

"There is a change coming, Master," he said. "The *jinn* of the desert are roused from their long sleep."

"A change is welcome!"

"Aye, but the change is wind," went on the blind man. "And wind will sweep away the tracks. We must get nearer to them, Master." And with a kick of his hairy legs the beggar urged his scraggy camel forward.

Tired and dispirited, Rodgers followed. He wondered whether it had not been just foolish egotism to follow this woman and her three Arab guards— to pit himself and a blind man against their ferocious determination. It would have been easy to tell Captain Johnson that the murderers of the two Arabs were even then in Aden. And when the Woman of Antioch and her three guards had ridden away into the desert, it would have been possible to persuade Wicks to fly along their trail and swoop down upon them.

But this was a personal combat, and Rodgers had decided to settle the affair himself. There was also that treasurehole in the desert. Each day, each hour, they were drawing nearer to it. From that treasure-house the sheiks were being paid to revolt....

So all that afternoon, until the setting sun stabbed them in the back, did Rodgers and the blind beggar urge their tired beasts over the wastes of sand. The evening star appeared in the sky.

"We must be less than five miles from them," groaned Rodgers, his bloodshot eyes still gazing at the tracks.

"And the winds are gathering in the desert," said Amin Yusuf.

"We will camp here," Rodgers ordered, as his camel stumbled for the fifth time.

The blind beggar sighed, but slid out of the saddle.

In silence the two men ate a little rice. There was nothing to drink. ...

Paul Rodgers had changed in these ten days; no longer was he the white-garbed European, sitting over his after-dinner coffee. His red hair was splayed over a face blackened with sand and sun. His body had shrunk through lack of food and drink. But there was still determination in those bloodshot gray eyes. The pursuit must continue— the account between him and the Woman of Antioch must this time be squared.

His head drooped wearily. Like a chasing shadow, night was rushing across the desert. He unslung the Bedouin rifle that he carried across his shoulders. He couched himself in the sand, and with a sigh covered his red head with his burnous.

"Sleep, Master. I will watch," murmured the blind man.

The incongruity of the remark appealed to Rodgers. He laughed, but in laughing fell asleep.

Half an hour later, crawling on all fours through the sand, the blind beggar disappeared into the desert wastes.

THE grayness of dawn awoke Paul Rodgers from his sleep. He found the blind man squatting at his side.

"There are men, many men, groveling in the desert like sand rats five miles away," murmured Amin Yusuf at the first stirring of Rodgers.

This news caused the white man to sit upright.

"How do you know?" he asked.

"I heard them, in the darkness of the night," said the blind man patiently. "While you slept I crawled beyond the sand ridges and suddenly discovered a hole in the desert— a big hole where *jinn* are born. But men were digging."

"Digging!"

A steely glint came into the gray eyes of Rodgers. So Amin Yusuf had found a hole in the desert! It meant that a blind man had gazed upon the secret mines of Ophir, the mines where slaves had sweated and died that treasure might be emptied into the lap of Sheba.

He decided quickly. His feet slid into his sandals; his hand crammed a few dates into his mouth.

"We must part here, Amin Yusuf," he said quietly.

"Master!" whimpered the blind man.

Rodgers turned his blackened face to where the sun was streaking the sky.

"You will stay here with the camels," he said. "I am going to dig with the sand rats in the big hole."

"But the woman, that daughter of Shaitan?" protested Amin Yusuf.

"She must be sought stealthily," replied Rodgers. "A man with eyes must seek her. When I have found her, I will return to you."

"And if you do not return?" asked the blind man.

PERHAPS it was the cold morning air that caused Rodgers to shiver slightly. But he knew well that the Woman of Antioch was a dangerous enemy; if he was caught there would be no mercy.

He fumbled in his burnous, and drew forth paper and pencil. There, at dawn in the great empty quarter of the Rub 'al Khali, he scrawled a message. Dirty and crumpled, it might reach its destination in Aden. If it did, the man who read it would know that he, Paul Rodgers, who was known as the Red Wolf of Arabia, had died a miserable death. But those few words would also reveal a great conspiracy that was brewing in the desert. Other men would take up the trail.

"If I do not return," said Rodgers quietly, "you will ride these camels back to Aden. Do not delay. In Aden you will seek out Captain Johnson, the chief of police. You know him?"

Amin Yusuf spat in the sand. He knew him.

"And how long do I wait?" asked the blind man.

"Unto the second night."

"If you do not come, Master, I shall know—" He hesitated.

"You will know that I have failed," replied Rodgers. "*Insha'allah*!" And he turned away.

But there was a sob behind him. The man with the scarred face had brought forth a cruel Arab knife. It gleamed in the first rays of the sun.

"Master," pleaded the beggar, "let me go! I will find her and slit her throat with this knife that I have dedicated to the deed."

Rodgers' eyes narrowed.

"Get back to the camels, Amin Yusuf!" he ordered. "By Allah, I will be obeyed."

The blind man cringed in the sand. Then he lifted his sightless eyes and stared in the direction Rodgers was taking... The blind man shivered.

"Allah protect him," he muttered.

Sore two hours later Rodgers lay within the shade of a sand ridge, gazing down upon the most amazing sight that he had even seen in the desert. To reach his point of vantage he had had to slither past two watchful sentries—typical Arabs of the Rub 'al Khali, with their indigo skirts swathing sturdy legs, and the rest of their bodies bared to the sun and wind of the desert. Each sentry carried a rifle of modern pattern.

But they had failed to notice that slinking form in the sand. And now Rodgers was perched on the edge of the big hole in the desert. Beneath him the sand had been swept away and revealed cliffs that descended several hundred feet. Swarming on ledges, digging into sand, hewing and hacking with primitive tools, were hundreds of Arabs. Against the cliffs they seemed like ants or maggots, worming treasure from the earth. Each man had a basket, and into these baskets stones and rubble were tumbled.

A cracking sound came to Rodgers' ears, and he glimpsed whips. Each group of workers had an overseer with a whip in his hand, and the whip was used frequently on the bare backs. The men worked furiously. Much work must be done before the brassy sun climbing the heavens made work impossible, so the diggers were urged on to their task.

Slaves digging for diamonds! So it had been in the days of the Queen of Sheba, and so it was today. It was another woman, ruthless in her desires and implacable in her hatreds, who now demanded this sacrifice in blood and sweat for the stones and pebbles that meant power in the great cities of civilization. The mines of Ophir were being looted once again, while the Woman of Antioch watched greedily.

With one quick glance over his shoulder, Rodgers began to slither down the cliffs.

The man lay in the sand. His brown body, slashed and broken, was stepped over by workers staggering beneath heavy baskets of stones. An hour ago a whip had lashed him— but already the man was forgotten, and the sandaled feet of the treasure-diggers spurted sand as they passed over the lifeless body.

No one noticed that his basket, which had rolled aside, had been taken up by another Arab, bare to the waist. No one noticed that this Arab had gray eyes deep-set in his blackened face. He worked doggedly; only once when he paused to gaze about him did the lash crack in the air and bite into his skin.

"Are you the owner of camels, that you can stand and stare?" snarled the overseer.

Clenching his hands, Rodgers bent his back with the humility of a slave. In the hour that he had been working, the full extent of this amazing Geaeutetotse in the desert had been revealed to him. The squatting black tents of the workers lay within the mine itself, close to the cliff. Three large tents raised themselves out of the sand, a few hundred yards away. Sentries guarded them, and from one, no doubt, the Woman of Antioch surveyed the excavation whose treasure would lead her to a great triumph.

A man stumbled past Rodgers.

"The death-thirst is on me!" he croaked. "Give me water, for the love of Allah."

He stretched out trembling hands for the earthen jar that rested in the sand near by, and buried his head in the jar— but he was so weak that the water trickled down his chest. He was about to pitch forward, but Rodgers stretched out a hand and caught him.

"Thank you, brother," moaned the Arab, and turned the eyes of a grateful beast of burden toward Rodgers.

But even as he spoke, the whip whistled in the sunlit air and bit into his body. With a groan he dropped the jar; the precious water began to trickle out.

With a yell of rage, the overseer brought his whip down upon Rodgers. It was too much for the man with the gray eyes. He caught the overseer by the throat and flung him to the ground. Almost at the same time he grabbed the whip and began to lash the fellow as he lay there.

A murmur of awe and fear rose from the workers. They halted, staring at this slave who dared so much. But the murmur was lost in a growl of rage that came from the other overseers who rushed, whips in hand, to the attack. They fell upon the recalcitrant one and began to beat him. Paul Rodgers reeled and the sunlit sky went black.

"Stay your hands, men

A calm voice petrified them into inaction— a voice that unquestionably commanded— above all, a woman's voice. Lying in the sand, Rodgers twitched at the sound more than at the lash of the whips. The Woman of Antioch!

"Lift up this bold slave!"

Rough hands dragged him to his feet. Dizzy with pain, his blackened face smeared with sand and sweat, Rodgers found himself gazing into eyes whose dark depths had on more than one occasion displayed hatred, passion and even a queerly distorted love. They gleamed now. Did she recognize him? Her gaze did not waver as a torrent of Arabic explanations came from the overseers. Her white-clad form had a subtle grace amidst those toil-racked bodies working against the cliff.

"This slave is brave. He has the strength of ten men in his body," she said quietly.

"By Allah, he has!" groaned the overseer who had been hit by Rodgers. He had raised himself from the sand and stood humbly before the half-veiled woman in white.

A gleam of amusement came into those dark eyes above the veil. Beneath the veil, however, the rich lips must have twisted cruelly. She' turned to the overseer.

"If he has the strength of ten men," she said, "then it is for you to see that he works like ten men! Such bodies are rare. Do not spoil them. Work them to death, but do not lash them to death. See that this slave works the whole day without rest. And when the day's work is finished bring him to the tent of the Sheik Abdulla Marabout."

"It shall be as you say," grunted the overseer, a leer crossing his face.

AGAIN those eyes glanced at Rodgers. There was the soft sound of laughter, laughter such as the blind beggar heard even in his darkness and

could never forget. Rodgers gazed back boldly at those eyes, searching them for some sign that he had been recognized. But there was only a gleam of amusement in them. She passed on.

Once again the whip cracked. Rodgers bowed his bruised body and took up the basket... .

Eight hours later a bent and toil-worn slave was dragged by the overseers to one of those three tents that lay beyond the cliffs of diamonds. His gray eyes salty with sweat, his body bruised and battered, he was thrust forward into an atmosphere of soft rugs, a luxurious divan, and the tinkling of a piano.

A piano!

Paul Rodgers lifted a weary head at the sound. In that tent in the heart of the great empty quarter of Arabia, some one was playing Chopin's *Marche Funebre*! He stood listening; then his mouth twitched with the semblance of a smile. It was a mechanical piano— one of those ordered by the Sheik Abdulla Marabout.

FOR nearly a minute Rodgers and the overseers stood within the tent while the solemn music surged somewhere beyond a hanging wall of silk. The men with their whips shuffled uneasily. And as the march continued with an implacable sonority to the end, Paul Rodgers felt a chill of apprehension at his spine.

The "Funeral March" ended. Then a woman's voice spoke sharply:

"Leave the man. Wait outside the tent."

Bowing to that unseen voice and with a final leer at the prisoner, the overseers withdrew. Even as they shuffled into the sand outside, the silken wall was dragged aside and the veiled Woman of Antioch entered.

"Chopin, I am told, was always your favorite composer, my dear Rodgers." She smiled cruelly.

So she *had* recognized him! A great weariness overcame Rodgers. For once the miasma of defeat swirled about him.

"And this," went on the Woman of Antioch, "is the music that you people of the West trumpet over a corpse. Much good it does the corpse! But on this occasion the dead man has the pleasure of hearing his own funeral march."

"The dead man being—"

The Woman of Antioch nodded.

"Yourself. You are, my dear Rodgers, practically a dead man. Allah does not send you into my hands a third time merely to escape."

Rodgers moved his racked body a step toward her. Simultaneously her hennaed fingers appeared, grasping an automatic pistol, with the barrel pointed at him.

"Very well," sighed Rodgers. "Shoot and have done with it."

Once again the weariness of conflict was upon him. In that fleeting moment as he faced his worst enemy, the fact that he had failed did not sting him with bitterness, for he realized that though the man had failed, the great game would go on. Eventually the real failure and bitterness would be for the Woman of Antioch; to others, sitting comfortably in the club at Aden at this moment, there would be an ultimate triumph.

"No, no, my dear Rodgers," smirked the Woman of Antioch. "Your lethal weapons of the West, though sure and certain, are too lethal for us of the East. To a man like the Wolf of Arabia such a death is easy. In Arabia our enemies are punished with slow death. That Chopin music was only the beginning; there will follow the thirty-seventh punishment."

"The thirty-seventh punishment ?"

Rodgers looked into those cruel dark eyes; there was no mercy there.

"Yes. Shall I read it to you?" She began the singsong chant of the mosque: " 'And the man shall be buried up to his neck in the sand. Only his head shall remain above the surface. He will drown in the sand. The sun that withers and scarifies the earth will blaze down upon him. He will undergo the tortures of the damned and cry out for mercy. But there must be no mercy. *Allah o Akbar*! Great is Allah!' "

Rodgers swayed—he was about to leap forward in a last desperate effort to rid the world of this woman who hated the white race-so fiercely. But as though she sensed the desperation in his gray eyes, she cried out—and instantly the overseers shuffled in. Their hands grasped his bruised body.

"And such is the thirty-seventh punishment," cooed the Woman of Antioch. "A miserable and painful end, my dear Rodgers. That you, the first of all white men, should discover the long-lost mines of Ophir only to die, is indeed sad. There will be no lectures to those staid geographical societies in London and New York—no honor to heap upon you. Only your skull will lie rotting upon the surface of the sand, a thing for the jackals to lick and grin at."

Rodgers hung limply in the hands of his captors.

"But at least your great plan will fail," he said quietly. "Already the news is being taken by fast camel to Aden. All this treasure that you are digging, and the creation of this puppet the Sheik Abdulla Marabout, will be useless. When that message enters Aden, the lethal weapons of the West will be set in motion. Airplanes will hover over the palace of the sheik. Bombs will be dropped. And the Woman of Antioch will find even the empty quarter of Arabia no safe hidingplace."

Impulsively, the hand that held the automatic pistol struck him across the face. Blood trickled from his mouth. The cry of rage that came from the Woman of Antioch died away at the sight of that blood. A strange gleam, almost of pity and love, came into her eyes. A caressing hand stretched out toward him; then the hand hesitated.

"Take him away!" she ordered in Arabic. "Let him dig for treasure until the noonday sun tomorrow, and then bury him to the neck in the sand. He must work for us before he dies."

The overseers dragged Rodgers out of the tent. When he had gone the Woman of Antioch flung herself to the divan. Sobs shook her body.

IT was finished.... Numbed and half dead, Paul Rodgers was buried in the sand up to his neck. His flaming crop of hair, and keen-featured face lay on the surface of the desert almost like a decapitated head. They had placed him on a sand ridge overlooking the mines of Ophir.

"In Europe the heads of traitors were spiked as a warning outside the gates of the castles. Your head will be a warning to those who dare advance through these sands to our treasure-hole."

So the Woman of Antioch had spoken, as she turned her back upon this dreadful deed and walked slowly back to her tent. It seemed that for once the Orientalism of her nature could not endure the sight of that face suffering the agonies of blazing sun, thirst and torture. Rodgers was left alone.

He was like a man drowning in a boundless ocean. But it was an ocean of fire. The sun beat down mercilessly upon his head; his limbs were clamped fast by the weight of the sand. The desert seemed to be dragging him down into its fiery embrace. And always the torturing sun beat down.

With parched and blackened lips he prayed for the sun to set. Not that it would end his agony— but he was thinking of the blind beggar Amin Yusuf, and of the order he had: to ride to Aden with that message. It was important that Captain Johnson act swiftly. This treasure dug out from the mines of Ophir would be used to buy guns, ammunition, and all the necessaries of a great revolt in the desert. At the moment the Sheik Abdulla Marabout had left the camp of the treasure-diggers for his own land; he was to bring men and machines. Only the Woman of Antioch remained to control the treasure-cave.

Hour after hour went by with agonizing slowness. Rodgers became delirious. He began to sing snatches of melodies; he laughed loudly. One of the sentries stared suspiciously at this head in the sand that yelled to the brassy skies:

"*Three blind mice .... see how they run*!"

And each song was followed by a cackle of laughter from the red head in the sand.

Toward sunset only a queer croaking sound came from the throat against which the desert sand lapped so tightly. And as darkness came racing across from the horizon like an army of men on black camels, the sentry slipped his rifle beneath his arm and slithered down the sandy slope to where the evening meal was being prepared.

THE eyes of Rodgers looked down upon the mines of Ophir. The mines of Ophir! He croaked his despair at the sight. Whipped slaves, a revengeful woman, and boxes of diamonds.... And his own miserable carcass being strangled by sand. In the last glimmer of consciousness, he saw a slave crawling up the face of the cliff from the mine beneath. The slave moved cautiously, and yet stumbled. Through his half-blind eyes Rodgers dimly conceived the figure to be familiar. Amin Yusuf! Could it be? Had the blind beggar disobeyed his orders? Wrath rose in the half-dead body of the Intelligence officer.

The continuous manner in which the slave climbed, and that occasional stumble, revealed that the man was blind. It must be Amin Yusuf! And now he was moving away in a direction that would take him a hundred yards from the man choking in the sand. Rodgers realized that he must attract the blind man's attention. It was his only chance.

He raised his voice to sing; but only a horrid croaking sound came forth. His voice was gone—even to attempt to shout tortured his throat. But the blind man, now moving swiftly, was going in another direction. Rodgers made a last convulsive effort.

"*Three blind mice*.... *see how they run*!"

It came forth in a thin scream— the absurd melody that had tortured his brain and now tortured his throat to give forth. And as the trickle of sound went across the desert, Rodgers saw the blind man hesitate. Once again the imprisoned man croaked forth that nursery song. Then darkness, the darkness of night, swept over the desert.

FIVE minutes later, the half-delirious Rodgers sensed the blind beggar digging with his paws like a dog in the sand. But it meant hours of work in the darkness before Amin Yusuf dragged forth the numbed body. Then another half hour of feverish massaging of the limbs, before Rodgers could stumble into the desert, guided and sometimes carried, by the strangely quiet Amin Yusuf.

"Why are you not on your way to Aden?" croaked Rodgers.

There was a moment's silence in the darkness; then Amin Yusuf spoke.

"I came back to find that daughter of Shaitan, the Woman of Antioch," he said. have a long account to settle with her."

"And did you find her?"

The answer of the blind man was a sob of disappointment.

"I learned that she had ridden into the desert, an hour previously. It is said she goes to visit the Sheik Abdulla Marabout with important news."

This time it was Rodgers who was silent. He realized that, for once, the cruel brain of the Woman of Antioch had failed her. She dared not trust herself to see this man, whom Fate had placed in her hands, die from the torture in the sand. For, mingling with the passion of her hatred was the passion of love.

"At last the camels, Master," murmured the blind man.

Like a sack, Rodgers was lifted into the saddle. The blind man tied him to the beast, so that he would not fall.

"Where do we go?" asked the beggar.

"To Aden!" croaked Rodgers.

At the same time his hands felt the two rough diamonds at his waist. He dragged them forth, and tossed them carelessly into the sand.

"Diamonds of many deaths!" he cackled, and his knees instinctively urged the camel forward.

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9: Her Hero at the Front

Francis Gribble

1862-1946

Telegraph (Qld) 21 Oct 1904

English journalist, novelist, travel writer and biographer

IT was, though no one knew it, purely in consequence of the pressure which his wife put uppn him that John Smithson Baker, thee wealthy retired army contractor, left his mansion in Park lane and started for the front.

Mrs. Smithson Baker's motives in sending him there were mixed and not of the loftiest, though no shameless desire to get rid of him was included in their number. In part, no doubt, she was influenced by patriotism, and by the desire that the husband whom she had not married for love should do some heroic deed which might oblige her to fall in love with him.

The main influence, however, was the feeling that a relative at the front was a valuable social asset. At tea parties she heard all the other women talking of husbands, sons, and brothers who had answered the country's call for volunteers. She felt that the, too, must have a hero in South Africa to talk about; and as she had no brothers, and her children were still at school, there was no one but John Smithson Baker to send. So John Smithson Baker had to go.

She broached the subject, gently, saying "Don't you think, John, that at a critical time like this every one of us ought to make some sacrifice for the country?"

"Sacrifice, my dear? Certainly. How much!" said John Smithson Baker, automatically plunging his hand into his pocket and pulling out his chequebook.

Mrs. Smithson Baker corrected his error.

"No, no, I don't mean that," she said, and he restored the cheque-book to its place, and she went on: "I mean that, at a time when some member of every family is going to the front, don't you think it seems a terrible thing that ours should be the only family—"

She paused, meaning him to take the hint, binding that he did not take it, she repeated it at intervals, reproachfully running through long lists of friends who had joined the C.I.V.'s or the Imperial Yeomanry, till at last John Smithson Baker lost his temper, and, with a bad grace, gave way.

"You want to gel rid of me? Very well, I'll go, if it's only to get away from this eternal nagging."

She was ready to fall into his arms, with thanks and caresses and praise; but he had slammed the door, picked up his hat, and left the house. When he

returned he announced, still rather surlily, that he had booked a passage to Capetown on the *Grantalla Castle*.

"You passed the doctor?'' asked Mrs. Smithson Baker joyously.

"Confound the doctor. I don't want a doctor's leave to go to South Africa, do I?" replied her husband.

"Ah ! well, you'll lie able to join one or the corps they are raising in the colonv. I expect the doctors aren't so particular out there," said Mrs. Smithson Baker consolingly.

"Perhaps."

"Or if they reject you you might raise a corps of your own!"

"Anyhow, I'm going on Monday," said John Smithson Baker.

And he went, and though Mrs. Smithson Baker was not in love with him, she behaved during his absence as a model wife. She could hold her own now in society when the talk was of heroes at the front, and she did so.

"It's a terribly anxious time, she said, "especially for those of us, whose nearest and dearest are in danger. But we must wear a brave face, however hard it may be, and make our sacrifices as cheerfullv as we can."

Then she talked, really meaning or thinking that she meant what she said; and she waited for news from the front .with genuine eagerness.

From Smithson Baker himself she got but little news. He was a poor correspondent, save on matters of business. As a rule, in fact, he corresponded in cablegrams instead of letters, and these were naturally laconic. They told that he had arrived, that he had been up to Dc Aar, to Aliwal North, to Bloemfontein, that he was "all right," but nothing more. And this in spite of urgent appeals for detailed accounts of the military operations in which he was engaged.

"I know vou're distinguishing yourself, because I see your name in the papers," his wife wrote to him; and sure enough the name of Smithson Ilakor had appeared in the papers with some frequency. Mrs. Smithson Baker made quite a collection of newspaper cuttings which she carried about with her and showed to her friends when opportunity occurred.

It was:

The enemy made a daring attempt to rush one of our convoys a few miles from Koffyfontein, but, owing to Lieutenant Smithson Baker's skilful handling or his men, they were driven off with heavy loss.

A little later it was:

A small detachment of Menne's Scouts, under Lieutenant Smithson Baker, held a kopje for eighteen hours against a vastly superior force of the cnemv. The defence is considered one of the most gallant exploits of the war.

And then again:—

In consideration of his gallant defence of the kopje, Lieutenant Smithson Baker has been promoted to the rank of captain, and recommended for the D.S.O.

All this was naturally very gratifying to Mrs. Smithson Baker. She basked in the reflected glory. Yet not knowing whether to say that she had never learned that her husband was capable of such things, or that she had always felt that he had the makings of a soldier in him, she sometimes said the one thing and sometimes the other. But whatever she said, she always ended with, "And he's so modest about it, too. In all his letters he never boasts about anything that he has done. He always leaves me to find it out for myself from the papers." Presently the papers contained an item of news which caused her some anxiety.

In the official list of officers invalided home appeared the name of Captain and Brevet-major Smithson Baker, D.S.O., of Menne's Scouts; and half an hour later a cablegram was delivered at the house. It ran:

Coming home in Grantalla Castle. Been ill. Nothing serious. Voyage will put me right. Good business.
John.

Mrs. Smithson Baker sought further information at the War Office, but the official could tell her nothing more than she already know. She felt, however, that there was no serious reason for anxiety, and she maintained her cheerfulness. There was nothing for it but to wait patiently for the day when she could go down to Southampton and meet the steamer on which her hero was returning from the front.

She was nearer to being in love with him in those days than she had ever been before. He was indeed her hero, and she had quite forgotten that she had nagged him into going to the war to gratify her. vanity. Her gratified vanity was indeed transfigured into hero-worship, and she was in the mood to engage the town band to receive the army contractor with "See the conquering hcl'o comes!"

She did not do this, of course, as it would have been impossible as well as ridiculous; but she went to the meeting place with a flutter and a tremor which no action of her husband's had ever caused her, whether before or after marriage.

The tender took her out to the vessel. She threw herself into her husband's arms, with demonstrations of affection that astonished him, and he took her down to his cabin that they might talk. He was not in khaki, and he did not look in the least a military hero. He was in a tweed suit, with a golf cap, and he looked liko a jolly, prosperous merchant. And he talked like one.

"Well, my dear, I'm glad to bo back, hut I did pretty good business out there all Lite same," was his common-place greeting, as soon as she would let him speak.

The expression shocked and pained her. He seemed incorrigible. Yet he had done things!

"Business, John! My hero from the front, however modest he is, must not talk about these things as business," she said with pained playfulness.

"Why not? What things do you mean ?" asked the army contractor, with a puzzled look.

"Why, your gallant deeds, your distinguished services. You were so modest that you wouldn't write about them, but I know about them. The papers were full of them. Why, look here!"

She brought out her newspaper cuttings and spread them on the berth. To her amazement her husband hurst into a loud guffaw.

"John, John, what are you laughing at?" she asked pleadingly.

He went on laughing louder than over.

"What is it, John? Please explain," she urged; and at last he did explain.

"Why, my dear Emily, to think that you've been mixing me up with my namesake, young Smithson Baker, of Menne's Scouts. A fine young fellow. I met him several times. He—"

But Mrs. Smithson Baker declined to take any further interest in the namesake.

"It wasn't you, then, after all, John?" she interrupted, with tears in her voice.

"Of course not, my dear. Be sensible. Do I look like a man who would hold out for eighteen hours on a kopje against overwhelming numbers of the enemy? Do you imagine it was for nonsense of that sort that I went to South Africa— a man of my age and business experience?"

She passed the word "nonsense," though it made her angry. There were other disappointments to be enumerated.

"And you haven't got the D.S.O., or the K.C.B., or something of that sort?"

"K.C.B.? Certainly not, my dear. K.T.— that's more in my line."

"K.T.? Knight of the Thistle ?" repeated Mrs. Smithson Baker.

"Knight of the Thistle? No, no. Knight of the Treacle," replied her husband.

"Knight of the Treacle? What do you mean, John?"

"What do I mean? Evidently you don't read the *Contractors' Chronicle*."

"The *Contractors' Chronicle*, John? Why on earth should I read the I *Contractors' Chronicle* ?"

"Well, if you bad read it, Emily, you'd have, read that John Smithson Baker entered into a contract to supply treacle to the mobile coulmns, and was I thanked by the Commander-in-Chief for the satisfactory manner in which he carried out his engagements."

Entity was beginning to cry, but John Smithson Baker, started on the story of his successes, did not notice that.

"I should have made more if I'd been able to take up the contract for supplying mobile columns with pianos and kitchen ranges; but as it was I cleared thirty thousand pounds. Not a penny less. It was quite like old times, Emily, quite like old times. I hadn't forgotten the old game, you see."

Then he noticed.

"But you're crying, Emily. What on earth arc you crying for?"

But she could not tell him. How, indeed, could she tell him that she was crying because he had toppled over her castle in the air— because the hero at the front, whom she had idealised and boasted of, had turned out to be only an army contractor after all? He was clearly incapable of understanding such a cause for tears.

"Nothing, nothing," she said, forcing the tears back, "I beg your pardon, John. I didn't, mean to cry. I suppose it's because I'm so glad to see you back again."

And John Smithson Baker believed her, and tried to cheer her up, saying:—

"Never mind, my dear. I've made thirty thousand pounds out of it. Not a penny less than thirty thousand pounds."

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10: The Burglar

Walter Ragge

Albury Banner and Wodonga Express (NSW) 11 Oct 1901
The Strand Magazine July 1900

The author popped up in The Strand Magazine *at the beginning of 1900, had a handful of short stories published that year, and disappeared back into obscurity. Nothing is known.*

RICHARD JOHNSTONE, commonly known as 'Dirty Dick,' had made a new start in life. For the last three years he had earned his daily beer by doing odd jobs for such citizens as needed an unskilled painter. This honourable, but scarcely lucrative, profession was now closed to him. He had never loved his work; he had a distaste for that great system of co-operation that is so marked a feature at the present day. In his own words, 'he didn't want no bloomin' master nor yet no bloomin' pals. He wanted to work on 'is own,' Nevertheless, he remembered with pride that, in the words of the judge, who addressed him from the Bench, he had 'for the last three years followed a respectable calling.'

Richard had described himself as a 'tar man', and the judge had entered him on his notes as a 'carman,' and was labouring under this trifling misapprehension when he addressed the prisoner before sentencing him to six months' hard labour for an aggravated assault on one of his employers.

The six months were over now, but Richard felt that this most respectable calling must of necessity be closed to an ex-convict. He had, therefore, chosen another, that would enable him to gratify his passion for independent work. He was now about to enter upon this now profession. It was an important step, and Richard was too shrewd a man to take it hastily.

He had made the usual inquiries and had satisfied himself that 'The Cedars' was in every way a most suitable house for a beginner. In the first place, there was no dog; secondly, the master of the house was in South Africa, leaving his wife at home; thirdly, two of the three servants were absent; fourthly, there was a most tempting little balcony over the hall-door; and last, but not least, there was not another house within a mile.

Richard looked regretfully at his new and shining tools which had cost him nearly his last penny; they would be almost useless in a case like this; still, perhaps it was best to begin with an easy job. Even a burglar cannot expect to spring into fame and wealth at once.

He slipped over the low wall, crossed the well-kept lawn, and halted a little to the right of the porch. He arranged the various bags for the carriage of tools and booty picturesquely about his parson, and started to climb the trellis-work

against the house. He reached the little balcony and stepped cautiously on to it. There were two windows opening on to it; one a French window which was closed; the other, an ordinary respectable British window, which was slightly open. The artist in Richard was awake that night— any casual amateur could enter a house by an open window: it was a burglar's business to break in— silently, skilfully, no doubt, but still to break in. He turned to the French window and tried his new tools on it, one after the other. He burrowed into the wood like an ant, but the window was no more open at the end of his work than It had been at the beginning. There was a little sawdust on the balcony, and that was all.

Richard looked again at the open window and pondered. The room was a bedroom, he knew, because when he had examined the house in the morning he had noticed the back of a looking-glass at the window. In Richard's philosophy an open window meant an empty bedroom; he never slept with a bloomin' wind blowing at him, not he; but perhaps some folks were fools enough to like it. Then, again, it might be a trap.

He tried to peer into the room, but heavy curtains obstructed the view. At last, with Infinite care, he put his hand through the opening and moved one of the curtains slightly. The room was nearly dark, but not quite. It seemed to him there must be a light of some kind in it, but be couldn't make out whore it was. Then there came to his ears a sound— a familiar sound, that carried him back to the days of his innocent childhood and his father's room in Brigson's Building, E. It was a snore; a good, uncompromising British snore.

A figure crossed his field of vision, with swift, silent steps. There was a gurgling sound and then a cry.

'Oh, lor, mum, how you startled me!'

'Hush, hush, for God's sake!' said another voice, In a hissing whisper; 'you'll wake him — you were snoring.'

'Well, mum, and if I was— I'm that tired?'

'Be sure, be quiet, I tell you.'

Then a third voice joined in, a feeble, wailing voice. 'Mother,' it cried, ' mother, it hurts me— oh, it does hurt me so.'

That was enough for Richard; he wasn't going to intrude where he wasn't wanted. It was quite a little family party in that room. The mistress of the house was there and her little boy, and the housemaid— the only servant at home that night. It was the housemaid that had snored and then called out. He knew her voice; he had thought of trying to get her to help at one time, but true to his rule of having no pals, he had abandoned the idea.

Well, then, these were the points to consider:— First, the other rooms must be empty. That was good. Secondly, all the three occupants of the house

were awake. That was bad. Should he go down again and try to get in on the ground floor, or should he climb up the trellis-work to another window? He decided on the latter course. The ground-floor windows would have shutters; besides, the people might go down to the kitchen to get drink for the boy or something. What was all the good of his climbing as a painter if he couldn't climb now!

He readjusted his discredited tools, swung himself off the balcony, and started to go up the trellis work to the next window. In all the weary months since that sad November morning, when she saw the ship that bore her husband and his comrades thrashing its way seaward through the fog, Mrs. Thorburn had never felt her loss so keenly as she did this night. She had sent her husband to his duty with a smiling face; she had braced her nerves to bear the dreadful strain of waiting, braced herself even to hear the news of that glorious tragedy, 'Killed in action,' that might come to strike her heart at any moment. She was proud to be a soldier's wife. But this night— how she longed to have him back, at all costs to his country, to his honour, to have him with her now. For their son, their only son, was ill, seized in the grip of one of those sudden sicknesses that mothers know so well. The nearest doctor lived two miles away, she had no neighbors, and there was no one in the house but the housemaid, Jane.

Jane had been dispatched for the doctor— had gone and found him not at home, and, with a literal obedience worthy of the British Army, had returned leaving no name or message because she had had no orders to do so.

The boy appeared to grow easier— he was sleeping when Jane returned, and Mrs Thorburn watching by the bed was less anxious now. She made Jane sit in the chair near the fire to be ready for any emergency. The snore that Richard beard had awakened the boy— he was in pain, restless, calling to his mother, and now and again wringing that mother's heart by crying, 'Father, father.'

The cries grew more piteous, the child seemed weaker.

'Jane,' she whispered, 'you must go again. Dr. Dean must be in now— go, and bring him back with you. If he is not in, go to the Bell, ring them up, and make Mr Jones drive you into Leamington, Be quick.'

'I can't, mum,' was the answer.

'You must. I cannot leave the boy now. Please, please go— for the boy's sake, Jane, go and go quickly.'

'I'm that tired, mum, I'll drop by the way.'

'Go to the nearest house, then go and tell them to fetch the doctor. Oh, can't you see how ill he is?'

Jane rose slowly and with many groans proceeded to the door.

'Well, mum, since you will 'ave it, I'll go and put on my things.'

'Things! Take my cloak— and Captain Thorburn's cap—'

Jane drew herself up.

'No, mum,' she said, haughtily; 'if I must hintrude on people in the dead of night, I'll do it in my 'at.'

'Quick, then. Where is your hat?'

'Upstairs, mum, in my room, which I laid it there when I come in just now, mum. I'm to go to Plummer's, mum?'

'Yes, that is the neatest. Tell him to bring Dr. Dean here; and if he is not in, to go on to Leamington and fetch the first doctor he can find. And, Jane— if you meet a man on the road near here bring him back and make him put the bridle on Jeremy and ride him.'

'There ain't no saddle, mum.'

'Never mind; do as I tell you.'

'The cart's gone to be mended, mum.'

'I know it has. Oh, don't stand talking here, Jane; go at once. Please go at once.'

' 'Ave you got the key of the stable, mum?'

'Yes, it's in my room, on the mantlepiece.'

' Yes, mum. And I'm to tell Plummer to come back here and fetch Jeremy ?'

'No, no, not Plummer— if you get to Plummer's tell him to start at once— but if you meet a man near here—'

'A strange man, mum! Oh, I couldn't, mum.'

The boy had hold of Mrs. Thorburn's hands; she could not move; if she had been free, no sense of dignity could have saved her from personally assaulting the respectable Jane. The fit passed.

'Go, please,' she said quietly. 'Go to Plummer and tell him to be quick.' Jane turned and left the room, banging the door behind her to prove that she was a free woman and no slave.

Mrs. Thorburn gently drew one of her hands from the child's feverish clasp and laid it on his forehead. The soft, cool touch seemed to soothe him; the poor, frightened eyes closed; the quick, painful panting ceased— he was falling asleep.

Suddenly, from the room overhead, came a wild scream that ran along the mother's nerves like a flame of fire, making the grasp of her right hand suddenly tighten on the slender little fingers that it held. The scream was followed by another and another— then came a rush of feet, and the door flaw open, and Jane pitched headlong in.

The little boy was awake now and crying, and Mrs. Thorburn ran to the grovelling, twisting, screeching mass of drapery on the floor.

'Get up,' she cried, 'you miserable fool, get up.'

Jane got up, still screeching, with wide-open mouth, and staring eyes like a fresh-caught cod. Her mistress seized her by the shoulder.

'Be quiet,' she said, fiercely; 'be quiet, or I'll kill you.'

Jane flapped down on the floor again.

'Burglars,' she wailed. 'Bub— bub— burglars. There's a m— man in my room.'

'You wretched coward,' said Mrs. Thorburn; 'a man! It was the shadow of the curtain. Get up, I tell you; get up and go at once. You might have killed the child.'

It was useless, Jane's screams subsided, but the slack mouth was still open, the vacant eye still staring, while a ceaseless babble of words poured forth as she lay Rack-like on the floor:

'Burgulars— burgulars— burgulars!'

The child's cries smote upon its mother's heart. What could she do? Her only messenger was useless now, changed by the flickering of a shadow on the wall into a maundering idiot. In God's name, what could she do ? Suddenly she heard a step, a heavy step, upon the upper staircase. Someone was there then, after all. She stood still, listening, listening. Yes, there it was again.

The woman on the floor raised her head — she had heard it too.

'He's coming,' she screamed, and went off into a paroxysm of whooping hysteria. He, whoever he might be, was coming down the stairs.

Richard had found little difficulty in opening the window to which he had climbed. An ordinary, every-day clasp-knife did the business; he had not yet recovered his trust in the tools that failed him so lamentably on the balcony.

It was a large room that he had entered— large and rather untidy. He examined every corner of it with his lantern; there was no one there, of course; he knew that, but it disappointed him to find that there was nothing worth taking there either. There were two beds, two dressing-tables, four chairs, two wash-hand stands, everything plain but good. Obviously, he was in the servants' bedroom. Well, there might be a shilling or two to pick up even there.

He swept the bull's-eye lantern round once more; there was a curtain with pegs for dresses behind it.

His inventory was cut suddenly short; a door banged somewhere below, and he heard steps coming upstairs. He hurriedly shaded the, lantern and dashed for the curtain, learning something of his trade as he did so. Always dash for the curtain first and then shade your lantern afterwards. Richard caught his foot an awful crash against the bed in passing; he was wearing

gymnasium shoes, so that the pain was considerable. He kept his thoughts inside his teeth, however, and waited. The door of the room opened.

'It's the housemaid,' he thought. 'She'll only have a candle. She won't see me.'

There was a click, and the room was suddenly flooded with light. It struck Richard that it was almost indecent for people who lived in a house of this kind to have electric light in the servants' bedroom. However he said nothing, but waited quietly behind the curtain. Jane entered. Richard know Jane by sight, for, as has been already mentioned, he had thought of taking her into his confidence.

'If she finds me, it won't do any harm to make a pal of her now,' he thought, secure in the power of his own attractions.

Jane went muttering to herself; she picked a hat up front the bed and adjusted it carefully at one of the looking-glasses. Then, she turned and came slowly and deliberately towards the curtain. Her muttering was audible now.

'The fuss she makes about that squalling brat,' she said and drew the curtain savagely aside. Richard had determined on a policy of ingratiation; he stood stock still and moved nothing bub his mouth. This wore a fascinating grin. Perhaps the light was bad, perhaps the fascination was overdone. Let the cause be what it may, the effect was terrible. Jane sprang back with a frightful screech, turned, screeched again, and then fled wildly from the room, leaving the unsuccessful Lothario still standing by the pegs.

When love rejected turns to hate, there's sure to be trouble, as the poet truly says, and Richard was angry. His self-respect had been sorely hurt; his plan had failed. His vanity was in even worse plight; he had smiled upon a woman, and she had started back and screamed as it he were a toad. The screams were still plainly audible; there was no need for concealment now.

Since love had failed, he must try what terror could do. He would go down— scare the women out of their lives, make them give up what they had in the way of valuables, and then decamp. It was too late to go back now. He had been seen— possibly recognised; he might as well get something for his pains.

He strode firmly to the door and descended the stairs, planting each foot heavily, to strike awe into the hearts of those below. He was guided by Jane's screams to the sick room; the door was open, and as he reached it the electric light was turned on. All the better; it was no time for concealment now; the light would show these women that he held a pistol in his hand.

He strode into the room, holding his bag, of tools in one hand and a new cheap revolver in the other. He glanced round. Jane was still grovelling on the floor, the little boy had raising himself in bed; his mother stood near him. The

eyes of all the three were fixed on Richard's face. He advanced another step; slow and inexorable as fate. It was most effective. Jane dropped her head on the floor again; the boy seized his mother's hand began to cry; only Mrs. Thorburn was unmoved.

'Well, sir,' she said, 'what do you want here?'

Richard made an effort, and produced a voice from somewhere in the lower region of his waistcoat— a voice hoarse and hollow— the voice of the Adelphi murderer.

'What do I want?' he said ; 'I wants yer jewels and yer money, and if yer don't 'and 'em over quick, I wants yer life.'

The voice was rather cracked and weak towards the end of this long sentence, but on the whole it was an admirable performance.

Mrs. Thorburn looked at him in silence— Richard did not understand or like her attitude— he was gathering himself together for another effort, when she spoke.

'You have come here,' she said, slowly, ' because you knew that Captain Thorburn was away in Africa — because you knew that there was no one In the house but two women and a little boy. And, you are a man— an Englishman! You coward, you miserable, dastardly coward!'

He stood before her like a stopped clock; what was a man to do with a woman like this? He said nothing. There was no sound in the room but the gurgling of Jane upon the floor and the cries of the little boy in the bed. These cries suddenly ceased, there was a choking sob, and then silence.

Mrs. Thorburn turned to the bed; her son's head had fallen back on the pillow— he had fainted. She dashed to the cupboard, fetched a little bottle, and moistened the boy's lips with the contents. A little colour came into his cheeks, his eves opened, and he began to moan. Jane was still gurgling on the floor, while Richard watched the scene with vacant eyes. The rules of burglary as he knew them did not deal with cases such as this.

Suddenly the mother turned towards him.

'Man,' she cried, 'he's dying. Go, go. Run to Dr. Dean's.'

'Dr. Dean!' repeated Richard, foolishly.

'Yes, yes, at Shelton — the first house in the village; run man, run. He's dying! Oh, can't you see he's dying ?'

Richard turned, dropped his bag of tools upon the floor, and was out of the room and down the stairs in three strides, had unchained and opened the front door, and was running down the road to Shelton before his brain began to work. He had gone nearly a quarter of a mile before it struck him that this was not strictly burglary. He slackened his speed for a moment.

'That's a fine woman,' he said, aloud; 'a bloomin' fine woman,' and this thought occupied his mind for another mile or more.

He was only half a mile from Shelton when he noticed a cottage by the side of the road noticed the gate of that cottage and a bicycle gleaming in the moonlight by the side of the gate. He stopped, his head buzzing and thumping from the unaccustomed exercise. Here was a bicycle— he'd go quicker on a bicycle, not that he was much of a dab at it; but still— he seized the machine, dragging it into the middle of the road, essayed to mount.

Suddenly a large man came running to the gate, flung it open, and rushed towards Richard. With a last frantic effort the burglar sprang into the saddle, wobbled wildly for three yards, and crashed into the ditch. He struggled to his feet, trampling the bicycle into spillikins as he did so, and started to run, but the large man was too quick for him.

'Stop, you scoundrel,' he shouted, and seized him by the collar.

Richard wrenched himself free, and the two men faced one another in the moonlight. No sound came from the cottage,

'What are you playing at?' said the large man, edging gradually nearer.

'Playin' at?' said Richard; 'playin' at? I'm fetchin' a doctor.'

The large man stood still. 'A doctor?' said he. ' Who wants a doctor? Where do you come from ?'

'The Cedars,' said Richard, with a happy flash of memory.

'The Cedars? Mrs. Thorburn? Are you her man?'

'Yus,' said Richard.

'Very good,' said the large man, 'and whom were you going to fetch?'

'Dr. Dean,' was the answer.

'Do you know him?'

'Yus.'

The large man moved another step nearer. 'Now, my man,' said he, cheerfully, 'you will kindly come along with me. If you come quietly it will be all the better for you, but I'm afraid I must give you in charge. Don't move, now.'

'What for?' said Richard, angrily, 'I'm goin' for a doctor, I tell 'ee.'

'Yes, you've told me quite enough. You cay you're Mrs. Thorburn's man ; Mrs. Thorburn's man is lying ill in that cottage. You say you know Dr. Dean— well, I am Dr. Dean. And, now, will you come quietly?'

' You are Dr. Dean?' said Richard thickly.

'Yes, I am Dr. Dean, very much at your service, and a magistrate as well as a doctor, my friend.'

'Then, if you're Dr. Dean, you come along to The Cedars.'

'No, no; you come along to Shelton.'

'But I tell 'ee you're wanted.'

'And I tell you you're wanted. Now, no nonsense, my man j come along with me quietly.'

Richard leaped back and drew his revolver.

'Look 'ere,' he said, fiercely, 'you come back with me, or I'll blow your brains out. The boy's dyin' I tell 'ee.'

The doctor had gathered himself together for a spring; but at those words he started.

'The boy?' he said.

'Yus, the boy.'

'Well,' said Dr. Dean, after a pause, 'you seem to know something of the family. I'll come with you; but give me that pistol — not necessarily for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith.'

'Danged if I will,' said Richard.

'Then I won't come,' said the doctor.

'Then I'll blow your brains out,' repeated Richard weakly.

'Much good I should be then,' said Dr. Dean.

This point of view was new to Richard; he pondered for a moment, then:

' 'Ere's the bloomin' pistol,' he said, 'and now come along.'

'By Jove, you're speaking the truth after all, or you're cleverer than you look,' said the doctor, pocketing the weapon. 'Come on, we'll have to run for it; you're smashed my bicycle, confound you. I think I've got all in this bag that will be necessary. Come on,' and they started to run side by side along the lonely road. The doctor was in better training than Richard— he reached 'The Cedars' fit and cool; the burglar, who it must be admitted had run the distance twice at full speed, was almost at the last gasp. Mrs. Thorburn was at the window over the porch.

'Is that you, Dr. Dean?' she cried.

'It is, madam,' said the doctor; ' you want me?'

'Yes, yes; come upstairs at once,' and she disappeared.

The doctor turned and looked at his comparion critically. 'You told the truth,' he said. 'I beg your pardon. You had better come in and sit down; you seem fatigued. I will let the front door open, so that if you feel in need of a walk'— he paused, and then, with meaning, 'you can take your hook.'

Richard followed him blindly through the hall and sat heavily down at the foot of the stairs. The doctor ran lightly up to the front room and entered. Richard could hear the faint sound of their talk.

In spite of the buzzing in his weary head. He was not conscious of any consecutive train of thought, but he found himself at the last repeating over and over again, 'I wonder 'ow the little varmint is?'

He rose and walked unsteadily upstairs; he went tip-toe to the door and peered in. The boy was awake, but quiet, and evidently not in pain. Jane had gone. Mrs. Thorburn and the doctor were talking together at the foot of the bed, and there in the middle of the room lay his bag with the tell-tale tools partially exposed. He formed a plan; he would switch off the electric light, rush in, seize the bag, and be off through the open door to rest and plan another more successful burglary.

Stealthily he stretched forth his hand ; the boy sat up in the bed; he was detected.

He hurriedly struck down one of the two knobs and dashed forward Into the room. It was only another error. No darkness came; on the contrary, a second light sprang into being above the bed. Richard stood irresolute, hopeless, in the middle of the room, hanging his bead, as the doctor and Mrs Thorburn turned towards him.

There was a pause; then the doctor stepped forward.

'Aha !' said he, 'there is your messenger; come to see the patient, I suppose? Well, I can satisfy your anxiety— the patient Is doing well. Do you know this worthy person, Mrs Thorburn?'

The mother looked long at the man.

'Yes,' she said, at last; 'I know him.'

'Ho said he was working for you: Is that so?'

'Yes.'

The doctor paused, looking first at the woman, then at the miserable man.

' Are those the tools he works with?' he said, carelessly, picking up the bag from the floor.

'I— I suppose so.'

'You find him a faithful servant, I hope?'

'Yes.'

The doctor laughed.

'I thought so,' he said; 'so faithful that he threatened to shoot me if I wouldn't come to see your boy. Perhaps you'd like to speak to him. I'll just go and see how the housemaid is getting on. I'll be back directly,' and he left the room.

Mrs. Thorburn advanced quickly to the unsuccessful burglar.

'I thank you from my heart,' she said, 'You have been a good friend to me and to my boy to-night,' and she held out her hand. Richard took it, blinking miserably.

She looked at him for a moment, and then said, 'You heard what I said just now. I nave a pony and trap, and there is a garden to look after— I'm sure you could learn to do that, and there are two rooms over the stable where the last

man used to live. Will you take the place? I want a man badly; poor Cookson, who used to work for me, is too ill to do so any longer, the doctor tells me. Will you take the place?'

Then as the man was still silent she went on, with a little laugh: 'You know I told Dr. Dean you were working for me— you wouldn't make me a liar, would you? '

Richard blinked still more.

'I ain't fit for it, lady,' he said, at last, so gruffly that she could hardly hear the words.

'It is for me to judge of that,' she said. 'You have shown yourself a kind and honest man to-night.'

He was fairly blubbering now.

'God bless you, lady,' he said, wiping his eyes with the back of his sleeve. 'God bless you. I'd — I'd bloomin' well die for you.'

There was a step upon the stairs and the doctor entered, shooting a questioning glance at Richard.

'Well, Mia. Thorburn, I'm afraid you lost a servant,' he said, cheerily.

'Oh, no, I don't mean this worthy fellow. I mean Jane. The hysteria has passed off, but a sense of injury remains. I left her packing her boxes. Perhaps,' and again he glanced at tho penitent one, 'perhaps it is as well. And now, my dear madam, it is nearly day. If you will allow me, I have a suggestion to make. That is, that this worthy gentleman shall leave your service and walk with me to Shelton.'

'No, to,' said Mrs Thorburn, hastily, 'He is to take Cookson's place.'

The doctor looked at her.

'la this entirely wise?' he asked,

'Yes,' was the decisive answer.

'You have decided to take this man into your service, then? Very good. Then I suppose I must forgive him for transforming my new free-wheel bicycle into an American wire puzzle. But in these circumstances I have another proposal to make. Can you give me breakfast at 8 o'clock? I can cook It myself.'

'Certainly, doctor,' said Mrs. Thorburn, in a tone of surprise; 'and there is no need for you to show your skill. The cook is coming in the carrier's cart at 7 o'clock.'

'Very good, then. If I may I want to have a chat with this man of yours.'

Mr. Thorburn hesitated. 'Very well, doctor,' she said at last; 'but remember, he is my man.'

'Certainly, certainly,' said Dr. Dean. 'Come, my friend, we two champion runners will rest our weary limbs in the kitchen. I want to talk to you, to give

you a few hints about gardening. I want you to be more successful there than in your last profession. Come along.'

The doctor had the bag in one hand, he thrust the other through the arm of the bewildered Richard, and both men went down together to the kitchen.

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11: The Haunted Brig

Anonymous

North Queensland Register (Townsville, Qld) 2 Dec 1901

This story was published without title or author. "Vanderdecken" is, by tradition, the name of the skipper of the legendary ghost ship "The Flying Dutchman".

THE BOSTON brig *Mayflower* was a ramshackle old craft . Her high poop sheering prow and stumpy spare reminded one of Vanderdecken's phantom ship. When she left Rosario in Argentine, bound down the river to Montevideo to finish loading hides for home, I was second mate of her. Of course, the first night out I was considerably under the weather and hardly know how I managed to stand his watch.

At seven bells in the morning I was roused by a fracas on deck. The captain was vehemently exhausting all the sulphurous combinations in the Lingua Franca of the high seas. Incidentally, he was accusing the sailors of looting the cook's galley during the night.

"No, sir; 'tweren't us," chorused the shellbacks.

When the captain paused for breath one rascal remarked, "It must ha' been the ghosts, sir."

At that the old man turned on his heel and went below.

The sailors, holding on to their sides, ran forward to the fo'castle.

The cook declared himself, vigorously, incoherently, to the main course.

"What's upset the old man?" l asked approaching the mate.

"It's those dern ghosts," he answered.

"What ghosts, sir?"

"Humph! Don't know the yarn? The brig is haunted— has been ever since those two fellows were washed of the jib-boom. It was in the Gulf Stream. The brig was running off before a nor'east squall, and they were stowing the flying-jib. The old man was at the wheel and he let her come up suddenly— he must have been drunk. She plunged her nose into the sea clean to the foremast, and, of course, the men on the boom were washed away. It was murder, all right, and ever since, off and on, those fellows' ghosts have haunted the ship. Shortly after four o'clock this morning the lookout came running aft, frightened out of his wits. Going forward. I saw two white figures on the top-gallant fo'castle, dancing a devil's hornpipe round the capstan. I'm not superstitious, but I can tell you I got a scare."

The mate looked at me lugubriously.

"S'pose the ghosts rifled the doctor's domain." laughed I.

"Maybe not,'' said the mate. "But when anybody mentions ghosts the old man buttons up his lip and ups sticks for the whisky flask."

THE BRIG sped, along merrily, keeping close to the sou-west shore. The captain was on the lookout for a *pampero*, and a while before midnight we shortened sail. The ship was then four or five miles below Buenos Ayres. It was a dark night— very dark for that part of the world.

As I was about to sing cut "eight bells," two hands in my watch came running aft, crying incoherently.

The captain muttered aghast, "The ghosts again," and hastened below. With rollicking recklessness, I went forward to investigate.

Sure enough! There on the fo'castle head stood two figures looming ghostly through the gloom. Spellbound, I watched them for what seemed an age. Suddenly they emitted a shrink and jumped over the windlass towards me.

I did not wait to ask their business with me. but skedaddled aft. When I reached the poop, the shrieking phantoms were at my heels. Seizing a pump handle, I made a sweep at one of them as ha was clambering up the poop ladder. But I struck only air. The swing of the heavy bar nearly carried me overboard. Had the handle passed through an unsubstantial shade? No. The ghost had dodged, and now was stammering in, fright.

"Don't kill me, Mr. A. I'm not a ghost— I'm only Sam."

The ghosts tore white sheets from their shoulders and stood disclosed— two dern shell-backs. Perhaps I didn't feel like slaughtering the pair of them for making such a fool of me!

"Get forward, you scoundrels I stormed. "Away with you, or I'll make ghosts of you for sure."

"Good heavens, sir, let us be," they exclaimed. "The real ghosts were after us. Didn't you see 'em?"

"What are you fools frightened of? What are you giving us?" I roared.

"The ghosts are forward, sir, the real ghosts. They came up out of the water dripping ghastly. We'll never play ghosts again— never, sir!"

"At that moment the *pampero* struck the brig, shrieking through her rigging like a litany of Lucifer. The captain sprang on deck, but there was nothing to do. The brig, under a single topsail, leaped like a racehorse before the squall. In an hour or go the *pampero* passed without doing any damage, and we started to set sail again. The mate called his watch to loose the jibs, but not a man would go to the boom.

"You can kill me sir," said Sam, "but I won't go forward of the windlass. Them ghosts are waiting for us sure. Last night the starboard watch played ghosts to frighten you, sir. Tonight Bill and I were playing for the second, but

the real ghosts came over the bows and nearly napped us. Ask old Riley. He was watching the fun from the fo'castle and he seen 'em rise behind us."

Those scared shellbacks got on the mate's nerves and in consequence, the jibs were not set till daylight.

When the cook turned out that morning he found that his galley bad been looted another time. Of course, he went for the crew, but those shellbacks had nothing to say. Somehow I did not like it. If they had been in the galley their protestations would have been profuse enough. But they were plainly perplexed, and even appalled.

"It must have been the real ghosts this time," they muttered among themselves.

THE FOLLOWING night I had charge of the deck from twelve to four. A while after two bells, the ghosts began to declare themselves. Startling shrieks, blood-curdling groans issued from the bows. My watch clambered on the poop— my hair crept all around my head. In a few minutes the mate's watch came piling cut of the forecastle like greased lightning. They ran to the poop, too, and huddling together we listened, with chattering teeth, to the racket raised by the ghosts. After a time the ghostly sounds ceased, and we drew breath more freely. The sail ors camped in the waist, but they did not sleep much.

In the morning, there was a row in the fo'castle. Two men had lost their tobacco and pipes, and were blaming their shipmates. To accuse one's shipmates of robbery is a dangerous business. The mate, hearing the angry voices and fearing trouble made inquiries. On his suggestion, the forecastle was turned wrong side out, but neither-pipes nor tobacco were found.

"The ghosts must have been here last night," said the mate. "They probably don't like the sort of smoke going among spirits and wanted a pull at a sailor's pipe."

The sailors cooled down at once.

That day it blew a little, and we battened down hatches fore and aft. At night the sailors slept in the waist and stool their watches there, too. Even a handspike wouldn't persuade them to go forward to the fo'castle. At intervals the ghosts made their presence known

Next morning when I opened the forepeak hatch, two haggard, hairy beings jumped on deck, clamouring for food and drink.

"The ghosts," growled the men, running aft. I ran, too. The ghosts followed leisurely, laughing fit to split.

The captain was on the poop and he blocked the retreat.

"Who the devil— what are these scaramouches?" he asked.

"The ghosts," says I, as solemn as seven Solomons.

"Yes," said the tall, lanky one, "we are the ghosts, and we're hungry and thirsty, too."

"Hew; did you get aboard?" asked the old man.

"Over the bows. How do you suppose ghosts would come?"

"Blast your impudence," roared the old man. "I'll teach you to be funny with me. Get forward! I'm going to lock you in the carpenter's shop."

"But, captain, we're hungry and thirsty. For Heaven's sake give us something to eat and drink."

"Get out," grinned the old man, "ghosts should live on air. Another word and I'll threw the both of you overboard."

Thereupon he seized the handspike, drove them forward, and locked them in the dark and dingy carpenter's shop.

"Now, my fine lads," he said, "you'll have time to think over the foolhardiness of frightening honest folk."

Every half hour the captain marched up and down by their prison, taunting them. They begged for something to eat, something to drink, but the old man had no pity for them.

"Ghosts shouldn't eat or drink," he laughed, ironically.

A while after dinner the prisoners changed their tactics.

"Captain," roared a deep sepulchral voice audible all over the ship, "Captain, you're a murderer. Why did you drown us that way and make it necessary for us to haunt the brig? You think we are stowaways, but we are not. Lord, have mercy on your miserable soul, captain, but we are the ghosts of those drowned men sent to drive you from this ship."

The captain broke into a volley of oaths.

"You infernal rascals," he stormed ; "I'll tale you out of there and knock Hall and Columbia out of you. '

He went into his cabin, got his keys and went forward to lick those fools. He opened the slide, looked in— and then drew back with a face as white as a sheet

"Well, captain, what's the matter?" asked the mate. "Have you seen a ghost?"

"They've gone," exclaimed the old man, in a weak, tense voice.

The prisoners had indeed vanished like ghosts. No wonder the captain had turned white.

AT THREE in the afternoon, the brig anchored off the City of Monte Video. The captain went ashore immediately. At sundown neither captain nor boat's crew had returned. The mate hailed a bumboat, and hoisted up his chests.

"I'm going to dear out," he explained; "I wouldn't stop another night aboard this craft for anything. The old man won't come back, you bet."

After he had departed, the sailors dumped their dunnage over the side into a boarding-house runner's boat. I didn't object; I gathered up my luggage and went ashore with them.

Some time during the evening the police boat found the brig deserted, and put a man aboard to watch her. The ghosts, however, kicked up such a hideous racket that he got scared and swam ashore.

In the morning the haunted brig was the topic conversation among the water front. The captain resigned "his command. The agents took charge, and put a watch aboard for the day. The ghosts were relied on to protect her from water thieves during the night.

The agents the following day offered fabulous wages for a skipper and crew to take her home, but without success.

In the afternoon a tall man, middle-aged and clean-shaven, accosted me on the street. After a few random observations, he remarked:

"You hold a master's ticket, I believe."

"Yes."

"Would you like a captain's berth at a good salary-"

" Certainly; I'd jump at a chance."

"Well, I can put you in the way of one, but—"

"Well, what?"

He watched me narrowly for a space.

"How did you get on with the captain of the *Mayflower*?" he asked, at length.

" Not very well," I admitted. " He's an old skinflint.

"Good! You don't mind doing him a bad turn. What I want you to do is to take the *Mayflower* home. I'm a mate; I'll ship with you and get you a crew."

" My, friend," laughed I, "your proposition won't go. I've had enough of the Mayflower. I would not own her, much less sail her."

My would-be mate laughed in turn, uproariously.

"The ghosts won't bother you any more," he stammered. "I'll guarantee to lay them for good. I'm one of them."

Observing him closely, I noted a resemblance to the tall, lanky ghost. A clean shave and good clothes made a great difference, but the resemblance was clear. The recognition startled me.

"Don't get scared again," he remarked noticing my trepidation. "I'm flesh and blood, I assure you."

"But your disappearance!" I ejaculated.

"Oh, there was nothing supernatural about that. The brig was formerly fitted up for smuggling. She has a lot of secret slides and cunningly hidden holes that her last skipper didn't know about. I was mate of her twenty years ago, and I knew how to get out of the carpenters shop down into the hold. A dozen men could hide in some of her hollow beams."

"And your first disappearance—explain that."

"My chum and I were in a boat. You see, we had been shanghaied aboard a blue nose barque. While she was lying in the river some miles below Buenos Ayres, we stole a boat and started for town. Seeing a vessel's lights coming down the river, and fearing a *pampero*, we decided to board her. Swinging under the bows we clambered up the bob-stay. Of course I knew the brig at once, and when we clambered over the bows and saw two ghostly figures on the fo'castle head— well, I was a pretty scared man. When they fled aft, however, shrieking with fear, we saw that we were taken for ghosts, and knowing how the captain had drowned two men, we determined to have some fun."

Men who do business on the great waters are prone to superstition, and even after the mysterious manifestation aboard the brig had been explained, I felt diffident about making another trip in her. But, being a young man, I could not lightly ignore the chance of obtaining a command. My lanky friend appealed to my ambition and had h is way.

The agents engaged me at once on my own terms. Of course, we kept quiet about the ghosts, and they kept quiet during the voyage home.

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12: The Fiend of the Cooperage

Arthur Conan Doyle

Smith's Weekly (Sydney, NSW) 5 Nov 1949
The Manchester Weekly Times 1 Oct 1897

One of many lesser-known tales without Holmes and Watson.

IT WAS no easy matter to bring the *Gamecock* up to the island, for the river had swept down so much silt that the banks extended for many miles out into the Atlantic. The coast was hardly to be seen when the first white curl of the breakers warned us of our danger, and from there onwards we made our way very carefully under mainsail and jib, keeping the broken water well to the left, as is indicated on the chart. More than once her bottom touched the sand (we were drawing something under six feet at the time), but we had always way enough and luck enough to carry us through. Finally, the water shoaled, very rapidly, but they had sent a canoe from the factory, and the Krooboy pilot brought us within two hundred yards of the island. Here we dropped our anchor, for the gestures of the negro indicated that we could not hope to get any farther.

THE blue of the sea had changed to the brown of the river, and, even under the shelter of the island, the current was singing and swirling round our bows. The stream appeared to be in spate, for it was over the roots of the palm trees, and everywhere upon its muddy greasy surface we could see logs of wood and debris of all sorts which had been carried down by the flood. When I had assured myself that we swung securely at our moorings, I thought it best to begin watering at once, for the place looked as if it reeked with fever. The heavy river, the muddy, shining banks, the bright poisonous green of the jungle, the moist steam in the air, they were all so many danger signals to one who could read them.

I sent the long boat off, therefore, with two large hogs-heads, which should be sufficient to last us until we made St. Paul de Loanda. For my own part I took the dinghy and rowed for the island, for I could see the Union Jack fluttering above the palms to mark the position of Armitage and Wilson's trading station.

When I had cleared, the grove, I could see the place, a long, low whitewashed building, with a deep verandah in front, and an immense pile of palm-oil barrels heaped upon either flank of it. A row of surf boats and canoes

lay along the beach, and a single small jetty projected into the river. Two men in white suits with red cummerbunds round their waists were waiting upon the end of it to receive me. One was a large portly fellow with a greyish beard. The other was slender and tall, with a pale pinched face, which was half-concealed by a great mushroom-shaped hat. "Very glad to see you," said the latter, cordially.

"I am Walker, the agent of Armitage and Wilson. Let me introduce Doctor Severall of the same company. It is not often we see a private yacht in these parts."

"She's the Gamecock ," I explained. "I'm owner and captain— Meldrum is the name."

"Exploring?" he asked.

"I'm a lepidopterist— a butterfly-catcher. I've been doing the west coast from Senegal downwards."

"Good sport?" asked the Doctor, turning a slow yellow-shot eye upon me.

"I have forty cases full. We came in here to water, and also to see what you have in my line."

These introductions and explanations had filled up the time whilst my two Krooboys were making the dinghy fast. Then I walked down the jetty with one of my new acquaintances upon either side, each plying me with questions, for they had seen no white man for months.

"What do we do?" said the Doctor, when I had begun asking questions in my turn.

"Our business keeps us pretty busy, and in our leasure time we talk politics and drink quinine cocktails. We're both pretty well salted now, but our normal temperature was about 103 last year. I shouldn't, as an impartial adviser, recommend you to stay here very long unless you are collecting bacilli as well as butterflies. The mouth of the Ogowai River will never develop into a health resort."

There is nothing finer than the way in which these outlying pickets of civilisation distil a grim humor out of their desolate situation, and turn not only a bold, but a laughing face upon the chances which their lives may bring.

"Dinner will be ready in about half an hour, Captain Meldrum," said the Doctor. "Walker has gone in to see about it; he's the housekeeper this week. Meanwhile, if you like, we'll stroll round and I'll show you the sights of the island."

The sun had already sunk beneath the line of palm trees, and the great arch of the heaven above our head was like the inside of a huge shell, shimmering with dainty pinks and delicate iridescence.

"There's a certain romance about the place," said he, in answer to some remark of mine about the dullness of their lives. "We are living here just upon the edge of the great unknown. Up there," he continued, pointing to the north-east, "Du Chaillu penetrated. and found the home of the gorilla. That is, the Gaboon country— the land of the great apes. In this direction," pointing to the south-east, "no one has been very far. The land which is drained by this river is practically unknown to Europeans. Every log which is carried past us by the current has come from an undiscovered country. I've often wished that I was a better botanist when I have seen the singular orchids and curious-looking plants which have been cast up on the eastern end of the island."

The place which the Doctor indicated was a sloping brown bench, freely littered with the flotsam of the stream. At each end was a curved point, like a little natural breakwater, so that a small shallow bay was left between. This was full of floating vegetation, with a single huge splintered tree lying stranded in the middle of it, the current rippling against its high black side.

"These are all from up country," said the Doctor. "They get caught in our little bay, and then when some extra freshet comes they are washed out again and carried out to sea."

"What is the tree?" I asked.

"Oh, some kind of teak, I should imagine, but pretty rotten by the look of it. We get all sorts of big hardwood trees floating past here, to say nothing of the palms. Just come in here will you?"

He led the way into a long building with an immense quantity of barrel staves and iron hoops littered about in it.

"This is our cooperage," said he. "We have the staves sent out in bundles, and we put them together ourselves. Now, you don't see anything particularly sinister about this building, do you?"

I looked around at the high corrugated iron roof, the white wooden walls, and the earthen floor. In one corner lay a mattress and a blanket.

"I see nothing very alarming," said I.

"And yet there's something out of the common, too," he remarked. "You see that bed? Well, I intend to sleep there to-night. I don't want to buck, but I think it's a bit of a test for nerve."

"Why?"

"Oh, there have been some funny goings on. You were talking about the monotony of our lives, but I assure you that they are sometimes quite as exciting as we wish them to be. You'd better come back to the house now, for after sundown we begin to get the fever-fog up from the marshes There, you can see it com-ing across the river."

I looked and saw long tentacles of white vapor writhing out from among the thick green underwood and crawling at us over the broad swirling surface of the brown river. At the same time the air turned suddenly dank and cold.

"THERE'S the dinner gong," said the Doctor. "If this matter interests you I'll tell you about it afterwards." It did interest me very much, for there was something earnest and sub-dued in his manner as he stood in the empty cooperage, which appealed very forcibly to my imagination. He was a big, bluff, hearty man, this Doctor, and yet I had detected a curious expression in his eyes as he glanced about him— an expression which I would not describe as one of fear, but rather that of a man who is alert and on his guard.

"By the way,'" said I, as we returned to the house, "you have shown me the huts of a good many of your native assistants, but I have not seen any of the natives themselves."

"They sleep in the hulk over yonder," the Doctor answered, pointing over to one of the banks.

"Indeed. I should not have thought in that case they would need the huts."

"Oh, they used the huts until quite recently. We've put them on the hulk until they recover their confidence a little. They were all half mad with fright, so we let them go, and nobody sleeps on the island except Walker and myself."

"What frightened them?" I asked.

"Well, that brings us back to the same story. I suppose Walker has no objection to your hearing all about it. I don't know why we should make any secret about it, though it is certainly a pretty bad business."

We sat down to as good a native dinner as one could wish, served by a smart Sierra Leone waiting boy. I was just remarking to myself that he at least had not shared in the general flight when, having laid the desert and wine upon the table, he raised his hand to his turban.

"Anyting else I do. Massa Walker?" he asked.

"No, I think that is all right,

Moussa," my host answered, "I am not feeling very well to-night, though, and I should much prefer if you would stay on the island."

I saw a struggle between his fears and his duty upon the swarthy face of the African. His skin had turned of that livid purplish tint which stands for pallor in a negro, and his eyes looked furtively about him.

"No, no, Massa Walker," he cried, at last, "you better come to the hulk with me, sah. Look after you much better in the hulk, sah!"

"That won't do, Moussa. White men don't run away from the posts where they are placed."

AGAIN I saw the passionate struggle in the negro's face, and again his fears prevailed.

"No use, Massa Walker, sah!" he cried. "S'help me, I can't do it. If it was yesterday, or if it was to-morrow, but this is the third night, sah, an' it's more than I can face."

Walker shrugged his shoulders.

"Off with you then!" said he. "When the mailboat comes you can get back to Sierra Leone, for I'll have no servant who deserts me when I need him most. I suppose this is all mystery to you, or has the Doctor told you, Captain Meldrum?"

"I showed Captain Meldrum the cooperage, but I did not tell him anything," said Doctor Severall. "You're looking bad, Walker," he added, glancing at his companion. "You have a strong touch coming on you."

"Yes, I've had the shivers all day, and now my head is like a cannon-ball. I took ten grains of quinine, and my ears are singing like a kettle. But I want to sleep with you in the cooperage to-night."

"No, no, my dear chap. I won't hear of such a thing. You must get to bed at once, and I am sure Meldrum will excuse you. I shall sleep in the cooperage, and I promise you that I'll be round with your medicine before breakfast."

It was evident that Walker had been struck by one of those sudden and violent attacks of remittent fever which are the curse of the West Coast. His sallow cheeks were flushed and his eyes shining with fever, and suddenly as he sat there he began to croon out a song in the high-pitched voice of delirium.

"Come, come, we must get you to bed, old chap," said the Doctor, and with my aid he led his friend into his bedroom. There we undressed him and, presently, after taking a strong sedative, he settled down into a deep slumber.

"He's right for the night," said the Doctor, as we sat down and filled our glasses once more. "Sometimes it is my turn and sometimes his, but, fortunately, we have never been down together. I should have been sorry to be out of it to-night, for I have a little mystery to unravel. I told you that I intended to sleep in the cooperage."

"Yes you said so."

"When I said sleep I meant watch, for there will be no sleep for me. We've had such a scare here that no native will stay after sundown, and I mean to find out to-night what the cause of it all may be. It has always been the custom for a native watch-man to sleep in the cooperage, to prevent the barrel hoops being stolen. Well, six days ago the fellow who slept there disappeared, and we have never seen a trace of him since. It was certainly singular, for no canoe had been taken, and these waters are too full of crocodiles for any man to swim to shore. What became of the fellow, or how he could have left the

island, is a complete mystery. Walker and I were merely surprised, but the blacks were badly scared and queer Voodoo tales began to get about amongst them. But the real stampede broke out three nights ago, when the new watchman in the cooperage also disappeared."

"What became of him?" I asked.

"Well, we not only don't know, but we can't even give a guess which would fit the facts. The niggers swear there is a fiend in the cooperage who claims a man every third night. They wouldn't stay on the island— nothing could persuade them. Even Moussa, who is a faithful boy enough, would, as you have seen, leave his master in a fever rather than remain for the night. If we are to continue to run this place we must reassure our niggers, and I don't know any better way of doing it than by putting in a night there myself. This is the third night, you see, so I suppose the thing is due, whatever it may be."

"Have you no clue?" I asked. "Was there no mark of violence, no blood-stain, no footprints, nothing to give a hint as to what kind of danger you may have to meet?"

"Absolutely nothing. The man was gone and that was all. Last time it was old Ali, who has been wharf-tender here since the place was started. He was always as steady as a rock, and nothing but foul play would take him from his work."

"Well," said I. "I really don't think that this is a one-man job. Your friend is full ot laudanum, and come what might he can be of no assistance to you. You must let me stay and put in a night with you at the cooperage."

"Well, now, that's very good of you, Meldrum," said he heartily shaking my hand across the table. "It's not a thing that I should have ventured to propose, for it is asking a good deal of a casual visitor, but if you really mean it—"

"Certainly I mean it. If you will excuse me a moment I will hail the Gamecock and let them know that they need not expect me."

As we came back from the other end of the little jetty we were both struck by the appearance of the night. A huge blue-black pile of clouds had built itself up upon the landward side, and the wind came from it in little hot pants, which beat upon our faces like the draught from a blast furnace. Under the jetty the river was swirling and hissing, tossing little white spurts of spray over the planking.

"Confound, it!" said Doctor Severall. "We are likely to have a flood on top of all our troubles. That rise in the river means heavy rain up-country, and when it once begins you never know how far it will go. We've had the island nearly covered before now. Well, we'll just go and see that Walker is comfortable, and then if you like we'll settle down in our quarters."

The sick man was sunk in a profound slumber, and we left him with some crushed limes in a glass beside him in case he should awake with the thirst of fever upon him. Then we made our way through the unnatural gloom thrown by that menacing cloud. The river had risen so high that the little bay which I have described at the end of the island had become almost obliterated through the submerging of its flanking peninsula. The great raft of driftwood, with the huge black tree in the middle, was swaying up and down in the swollen current.

"That's one good thing a flood will do for us," said the Doctor, "It carries away all the vegetable stuff which is brought down on to the east end of the island. It came down with the freshet the other day, and here it will stay until a flood sweeps it out into the main stream. Well, here's our room, and here are some books and here is my tobacco pouch, and we must try to put in the night as best we may."

By the light of our single lantern the great lonely room looked very gaunt and dreary. Save for the piles of staves and heaps of hoops there was absolutely nothing in it, with the exception of the mattress for the Doc-tor, which had been laid in the corner. We made a couple of seats and a table out of the staves, and settled down together for a long vigil.

Severall had brought a revolver for me and was himself armed with a double-barrelled shot-gun. We loaded our weapons and laid them cocked within reach of our hands. The little circle of light and the black shadows arching over us were so melancholy that he went off to the house, and returned with two candles. One side of the cooperage was pierced, however, by several open windows, and it was only by screening our lights behind staves that we could prevent them from being extinguished.

The Doctor, who appeared to be a man of iron nerves, had settled down to a book, but I observed that every now and then he laid it upon his knee, and took an earnest look all round him. For my part, although I tried once or twice to read, I found it impossible to concentrate my thoughts upon the book. They would always wander back to this great empty silent room, and to the sinister mystery which overshadowed it.

I racked my brains for some possible theory which would explain the disappearance of these two men. There was the black fact that they were gone, and not the least little of evidence as to why or whither. And here we were waiting in the same place— waiting without an idea as to what we were waiting for I was right in saying that it was not a one-man job; it was trying enough as it was, but no force upon earth would have kept me there without a comrade.

What an endless, tedious night it was! Outside we heard the lapping and gurgling of the great river, and the soughing of the rising wind. Within, save for our breathing, the turning of the Doctor's pages, and the high, shrill ping of an occasional mosquito, there was a heavy silence. Once my heart sprang into my mouth as Severall's book suddenly fell to the ground and he sprang to his feet with his eyes on one of the windows.

"Did you see anything, Meldrum?"

"No, did you?"

"Well, I had a vague sense of movement outside that window," He caught up his gun and approached it.

"No, there's nothing to be seen, and yet I could have sworn that something passed slowly across it."

"A palm leaf, perhaps," said I, for the wind was growing stronger every instant.

"Very likely," said he, and settled down to his book again, but his eyes were for ever darting little suspicions glances up at the window. I watched it also, but all was quiet outside.

AND then suddenly our thoughts were turned in to a new direction by the bursting of the storm. A blinding flash was followed by a clap which shook the building. Again and again came the vivid white glare with thunder at the same instant, like the flash and roar of a monstrous piece of artillery. And then down came the tropical rain, crashing and rattling on the corrugated iron roofing of the cooperage. The big hollow room boomed like a drum. From the darkness arose a strange mixture of noises, a gurgling, splashing, tinkling, bubbling, washing, dripping— every liquid sound that nature can produce from the thrashing and swishing of the rain to the deep steady boom of the river.

Hour after hour the uproar grew louder and more sustained. "My word," said Severall, "we are going to have the father of all floods this time. Well, here's the dawn coming at last and that is a blessing. We've about exploded the third night superstition, anyhow."

A grey light was stealing through the room, and there was the day upon us in an instant. The rain had eased off, but the coffee-colored river was roaring past like a waterfall. Its power made me fear for the anchor of the *Gamecock*.

"I must get aboard," said I. "If she drags she'll never be able to beat up the river again."

"The island is as good as a break water," the Doctor answered. "I can give you a cup of coffee if you will come up to the house."

I was chilled and miserable, so the suggestion was a welcome one. We left the ill-omened cooperage with its mystery still unsolved, and we splashed our way up to the house.

"There's the spirit lamp," said Severall. "If you would just put a light to it, I will see how Walker feels this morning."

He left me, but was back in an in stant with a dreadful face.

"He's gone!" he cried hoarsely. The words sent a thrill of horror through me. I stood with the lamp in my hand, glaring at him.

"Yes, he's gone!" he repeated. "Come and look!"

I followed him without a word, and the first thing that I saw as I entered the bedroom was Walker himself lying huddled on his bed in the grey flannel sleeping suit in which I had helped to dress him on the night before.

"Not dead, surely!" I gasped.

The Doctor was terribly agitated. His hands were shaking like leaves in the wind. "He's been dead some hours."

"Was it fever?"

"Fever! Look at his foot!" I glanced down and a cry of horror burst from my lips. One foot was not merely dislocated, but was turned completely round in a most grotesque contortion.

"Good God!" I cried. "What can have done this?"

Severall had laid his hand upon the dead man's chest.

"Feel here," he whispered. I placed my hand at the same spot. There was no resistance. The body was absolutely soft and limp. It was like pressing a sawdust doll.

"The breast-bone is gone," said Severall in the same awed whisper. "He's broken to bits. Thank God that he had the laudanum. You can see by his face that he died in his sleep."

"But who can have done this?"

"I've had about as much as I can stand," said the Doctor wiping his forehead. "I don't know that I'm a greater coward than my neighbors, but this gets beyond me. if you're going out to the *Gamecock*—"

"Come on!" said I, and off we started. If we did not run it was because each of us wished to keep up the last shadow of his self-respect before the other.

It was dangerous in a light canoe on that swollen river, but we never paused to give the matter a thought. He bailing and I paddling we kept her above water, and gained the deck of the yacht. There, with two hundred yards of water between us and this cursed island we felt that we were our own men once more.

"We'll go back in an hour or so," said he. "But we need have a little time to steady ourselves. I wouldn't have had the niggers see me as I was just now for a year's salary."

"I'VE told the steward to prepare breakfast. Then we shall go back," said I. "But in God's name, Doctor Severall, what do you make of it all?"

"It beats me— beats me clean. I've heard of Voodoo devilry and I've laughed at it with the others. But that poor old Walker, a decent, God-fearing, nineteenth-century, Primrose-League Englishman should go under like this without a whole bone in his body— it's given me a shake, I won't deny it. But look there, Meldrum, is that hand of yours mad or drunk, or what is it?"

Old Patterson, the oldest man of my crew, and as steady as the Pyramids, had been stationed in the bows with a boat-hook to fend off the drift-ing logs which came sweeping down with the current. Now he stood with crooked knees, glaring out in front of him, and one forefinger stabbing furiously at the air.

"Look at it!" he yelled. "Look at it!"

And at the same instant we saw it. A huge black tree trunk was coming down the river, its broad glistening back just lapped by the water And in front of it— about three feet in front— arching upwards like the figure-head of a ship, there hung a dreadful face, swaying slowly from side to side. It was flattened, malignant, as large as a small beer-barrel, of a faded fungoid color, but the neck which supported it was mottled with a dull yellow and black.

As it flew past the *Gamecock* in the swirl of the waters I saw two immense coils roll up out of some great hollow in the tree, and the villainous head rose suddenly to the height of eight or ten feet, looking with dull, skin-covered eyes at the yacht. An instant later the tree had shot past us and was plunging with its horrible passenger towards the Atlantic.

"What was it?" I cried.

"It is our fiend of the cooperage," said Doctor Severall, and he had become in an instant the same bluff, self-confident man that he had been before. "Yes, that is the devil who has been haunting our island. It is the great python of the Gaboon."

I thought of the stories which I had heard all down the coast of the monstrous constrictors of the interior, of their periodical appetite, and of the murderous effects of their deadly squeeze.

Then it all took shape in my mind. There had been a freshet the week before. It had brought down this huge hollow tree with its hideous occupant who knows from what far distant tropical forest it may have come! It had been stranded on the little east bay of the island. The cooperage had been the

nearest house. Twice with the return of its appetite it had carried off the watchman. Last night it had doubtless come again, when Severall had thought he saw something move at the window, but our lights had driven it away. It had writhed onwards and had slain poor Walker in his sleep.

"Why did it not carry him off?" I asked.

"The thunder and lightning must have scared the brute away. There's your steward, Meldrum. The sooner we have breakfast and get back to the island the better, or some of those niggers might think that we had been frightened."

13: Cupid and Co.

Thomas L. Masson

1866-1934

Sun (NSW), 30 Dec 1910

Munsey's Magazine, July 1910

WHEN SPRINGTON sauntered out of the breakfast-room, with his morning cigar in his mouth, there was a man waiting for him in the hall. Although he was late, Springton was in good humor. On the evening before he had made the somewhat intimate acquaintance of one of earth's fairest— a lovely girl whom he had met only a few weeks before, and on whom he had called for the first time, in response to an invitation.

A rather unusual thing, this; for to this well-known and well-to-do bachelor, love had hitherto been unattractive. He was too much absorbed In his business affairs.

The man bowed. "I beg pardon, sir, but I represent the Globe Tourist Agency. Should be glad to go over with you some of the most popular honeymoon routes."

"Honeymoon routes?"

"Yes, sir. Even If you don't buy your tickets through us, it will be all right. It's a matter of business with us to furnish information. Now, I have one or two specialties— out of the way jaunts never before put on the market, and—"

Springton gazed at him in astonishment.

"What made you think," he asked, "that I was interested in honeymoons?"

The man smiled, "It's our business to know," he said significantly. "Quite an easy matter, I assure you. We have our lists of eligibles, and know pretty well what they are doing. Hope I haven't intruded. Here's my card. You can reach me over the telephone at any time. Pray don't make any arrangement without consulting me. I assure you I can make it worth your while. Thank you, sir. Good morning."

Springton marvelled as he made his way down to his office. It was, however, rather flattering. He entered his office at eleven o'clock. His chief clerk, with unusual solemn face, approached him.

"There's quit a mob outside to see you, sir."

"What do they want?"

"Personal business, they say."

"Well, show the first one in. May as well get them off my mind."

In a moment a dapper young man entered the office.

"Mr. Springton? Ah, good morning, sir! Are you Interested In building lots In the suburbs? During the first year of married life, you know, you will want to he quiet. Now, here's a choice bit of land— a wonder. Why, sir, in a year it will

treble in value. Three minutes from station. Or, If you want to remain in town, I have some really choice locations. Here's my card. Any time—"

He was ushered out, and the next man was shown in.

He was a trifle coarser in structure.

"I came to solicit your market bill, sir. We take the place of the housekeeper, you know. Relieve young wife of all responsibility. Guarantee choice cuts all year round. Don't have to call and select anything. We do it all. Takes away natural embarrassment young wife feels during the first year. Will furnish bond, If necessary. Bills weekly, pay when you please. Won't you give us a trial order?"

Springton promised to put his name on file, and the third man was ushered In.

"I want to call your attention to our banking facilities," he said. "I represent the Sixteenth National. We make a specialty of young married ladies. It's the only way to do, you know, to let them have a separate account. We keep you posted just how the account stands. You'll find us indispensable. Just put me down on your list. I can call and give you details at any time,"

He was succeeded by an interior decoration man.

"We make a specialty of young married couples," he began. "Now, I have a hundred different layouts, all calculated to give the right atmosphere. You know, sir, we have made a study of young married couples. I got married myself a couple of years ago, just to get the details of our business down fine. It's a fact that during the first year there is always a process of readjustment going on. Your surroundings are everything. They have a subtle and powerful Influence. Why, sir, we can guarantee that, with our number forty-seven, your wife won't have a particle of homesickness."

Springton was mechanically opening his mail, in which he had already found the cards of three ministers. He thanked the man, and dismissed him. Then he rang his bell for his clerk.

"Jasper," he said, "how many of these men still remain?"

"About ten or twelve, sir."

"Well, show them all in."

"The whole lot, sir?"

"Yes— all!"

The door opened, and eleven spruce men solemnly marched forward in single file. Each man, true to his Instincts, had his hand in his breast-pocket, prepared to snatch out a card and leave it on the table in case anything happened.

"Gentlemen," said Springton, "I thank you, one and all, for your attentions, but there is one thing that I don't understand. How in the world did you know that—"

A quiet, refined man, who had evidently been chosen the spokesman, now stepped forward.

"Quite simply, sir," he said. "We belong to the Young Married Man's Trade Combination. We employ a detective bureau and a medical staff, to say nothing of a trained psychologist. Last night, at midnight, all the members of our organisation were notified that you had spent three hours with a young lady who was your physical opposite, and therefore likely to inspire your love. All the circumstances of your meeting her were known; and the probabilities having been calculated by our statistical department, the chances of your being a good business customer were calculated to be about seventy-five out of a possible hundred. Word was sent around, and here we are. I may say that I represent the most scientific servants' agency ever incorporated. We guarantee every cook sent out, and—"

Springton waved them all off. "Leave your cards, gentlemen," he said. "Leave your cards, and I will communicate with you later."

A distressing thought had struck him. In thirty minutes more he was ringing the bell of the mansion which he had visited the evening before. He noticed several men waiting in the hall, and on the table was piled the morning's mull, together with a goodly lot of samples.

After some difficulty he was passed through the Hue, and shown up-stairs. He awaited in trepidation. At last she came. She was pale and nervous.

"Did you think this was my fault?" he asked hastily.

"I didn't know," she replied. "It seemed so strange. You didn't do it, did you?" she asked anxiously.

"I assure you, on my word of honor as a gentleman, that I knew no more about It than you. The moment that I found out what it meant— that it was only a matter of business— I assumed that you would also be importuned In the same way, und I hurried to protect you, if necessary, and also to declare my innocence."

"Won't your visit make matters worse?" she asked.

"Yes, I suppose so. The truth is, that this morning the question of marriage had never entered my head; but now that my attention has been called to the subject, and the entire business world apparently seems to think a wedding is going to take place, and is spending capital in soliciting our trade, why wouldn't it be better to get the matter settled at once?"

She looked at him with a tired, sweet smile. She was too worn to resist him.

"I am ready," she whispered, as she dropped into his arms. At this moment there was a knock at the door. The happy couple stood apart as the maid entered.

"Well, Maria?"

"I thought you might like to know, miss, that three new men have just asked to see you on important business."

"And who are they?"

"A diamond merchant, a bishop, and a Parisian baby-carriage-maker."

14: The Last Room

E. Temple Thurston

1879-1933

The Strand Magazine (US) Oct 1910

The Strand Magazine, Jan 1911

Sun (Sydney) 28 Feb 1911

THEY BROUGHT a spy into camp— a low-sized man, heavily bearded, with sullen eyes that lay watchfully behind the shaggy eyebrows— watchfully enough until we made him speak; then fear drove out all watchfulness. His eyes danced with fear.

War, after all, is only the acceleration of life, and men are human beings there as elsewhere. In fact, they are a little more human, perhaps— a little braver or a little more cowardly, as the case may be. In war you live quicker, feel quicker, you act quicker, and— you die quicker than in other circumstances; but you are every bit as much a human being. War will not make a hero or a coward of you. That has been decided long ago before the war breaks out.

And this fellow, for all his sullen eyes and tight lips, was quick enough to tell us where the enemy lay when we showed him the business end of a Martini.

Just five miles off, he said they were— fifteen hundred strong— a haul to make the papers sing at home if we could only catch them. You think of the papers when you are at the front, just the same as you do at home; in fact, you have about as little an idea of what a censor moans as have the correspondents.

Five miles off then and it was close on midnight. By daybreak those five miles might have become twenty. A small scouting party was organised at a moment's notice— eight of us, under Captain Galloway— they called him captain, but he had no rank. He was a soldier, the man who is a soldier, who takes to war as a baby to its bottle. Every muddle in Europe has had the stirring of his finger, every war that has taken place over the past thirty years has seen Galloway like a boy let out of school. When things are quiet, when there is nothing doing, Galloway sits in a London club overlooking Piccadilly and reads the papers— a fish out of water until the day comes when the papers enlarge their headings with that thrilling word, "Trouble"— in the Far East or Near East, in the North. South, or West, it makes no matter which. Then Galloway stirs in his saddle-bag chair. He looks up with a smile on his face, as though he had read of a rise in stocks. The first man he meets notices the change in his eyes. He looks awake again, like some animal after a heavy meal.

"There's going to be trouble," he says, cheerfully. "There's bound to be a mess," and the next morning Galloway is gone. For months his chair at the club is empty, until day he strolls quietly back, weather-burnt to the roots of his hair, bites through a cigar, and conceals himself once more behind his paper. This is Galloway, the man who led our little scouting-party that night.

It was nasty weather. A wet moon had ridden up under a bank of clouds that stretched down without a break to the west horizon. By that time we were well started. The night was as black as the heart of a coalpit. I could just see my horse's ears, pricking in the darkness at the slightest noise; three feet beyond his head and it was like a curtain,

We rode on in silence, picking our way like a woman over a muddy street. Sometimes a horse would stumble, a man would curse, and Galloway would grunt with amusement. He found no amusement in it after we had covered a mile or so. He cursed them then himself for clumsiness. He had every right to. He never took a false step himself. The man to command is the man who can implicitly obey.

"For all you know, this place is infested with these follows, sleeping with their one eye open." They could not help, the state of the ground, poor beggars; it was bad enough to be out on a night like that. But when a horse stumbled once more there was dead silence.

Once I looked at Galloway, staring out with eyes screwed like gimlets into the darkness, and I saw him grin. When there was anything doing in the daylight he was a man who chewed oaths as an ostler chews straws. We had ridden for an hour, and if we had covered four miles we had done well. I hardly think there were four miles in it. You can make little more than the pace of a snail over ground that is like the inside of a quarry and on a night as black as pitch.

Anyhow, we had ridden an hour when Galloway's horse threw up its head and stopped short. We all draw in behind him like sheep driven into a pen.

"What is it?" somebody whispered.

Galloway said nothing. He just leaned forward on tho neck of his horse and stared. We leaned forward and stared too. When they don't know what they're at, men are just as much fools as sheep. They follow their leader. It looks as if they knew what they were doing. We could see nothing. Presently Galloway sat up.

"Dismount," he said quietly, under his breath. We slid off. One of the men was despatched to look after the horses, and the rest of us crept forward with every sense expectant. Galloway had seen something. It was like him not to say what it was. Presently, after a few steps, a great wall, blacker than tho blackness, jumped up in front of our eyes out of nowhere.

"It's a farmhouse," I said. Galloway grinned at my observation. There it was, a flat-faced building, two-storeyed, stretching along the breadth of one room, with outhouses and sheds at either side. There was not a light in the windows, not a sign of habitation about the place. It looked as deserted as a graveyard in winter.

"There's not a soul in it," said I, and the next second I would sooner not have made the remark.

"Just run over it, then," said Galloway; "they hide in these places like rats. Hurry up!"

I stepped forward at once, trying to hide my reluctance. Over a job like this, if you can conceal your feelings, you may be satisfied. I did not like it; but you can't say so, even in the sense of a joke, to a man who has passed his apprenticeship on jobs of that kind, and thinks as little of it as looking over a new hat in Kensington. When I found the door locked I felt the blood in my face tingling quickly. I appealed to Galloway.

"Shoot It," he replied, laconically.

I pulled out my revolver, pushed the nose of it into the keyhole, and fired. Tho noise was a relief, but I took the precaution to stand inside as the door swung open on a creaking hinge. There was not a sound. When the echoes of my shot had died away through the house, like mice scampering over bare boards, the place was as still again us though nothing had happened. Then I crept in.

If anything, it was blacker than the night outside. I could see nothing, hear nothing, yet the place scorned full of listeners.

"*They hide in these places like rats*."

Those words of Galloway's supplied my mind with a thousand phantoms of imagination. I tried to look about in the darkness. It was useless. I had not those eyes of Galloway's. There was some satisfaction in thinking that if any poor wretch wore in hiding, he could as little see me as I him. But then I had not been sent to play at hlde-and-seek. If anyone were there, I had to rout him out.

My hand, as though obeying a command by some other will than my own, felt in a pocket of my coat for matches. I drew one out, found a rough surface which to strike it, held it there with my finger, and paused. Supposing a man were waiting with rifle ready cocked for a sight of my position. Then I was a dead man the moment I struck that match.

It takes some time to tell all this. It makes one seem possessed of the hesitation of a coward. I hesitated right enough, I felt a cold sweat of fear beginning to form in drops on my forehead, but all the thoughts and decisions went through my mind with the speed of lightning. From the moment that I

shot the lock to the time I struck the match was only a matter of seconds. I took a breath, dragged the thin bit of wood swiftly across the rough surface, and, as I flung it into the air, leapt to one side, crouching down low to the ground, every sense alert for that report which I made sure was bound to follow. There was complete silence. Like a rocket the match lifted, burnt blue, and was blown out before it reached tho floor. Then tho room was empty. All my apprehension had been for nothing.

I rose to my feet, feeling like a fool, struck another match, and held it high above my head. It was the usual low-ceilinged farm kitchen. We had had many a meal in them; many a poor fellow had been interrogated across the deal table which they all contained; many a time we had left them behind us with an ominous curl of smoke rising up from the windows before they burst into flame. And not a soul was to be seen.

There were cups and saucers on the table— crumbs of bread and a small piece of their cheese that they make in these places. I picked It up. It was still soft. On the table by the side of one of the cups was a drop of liquid— something they had been drinking— which had not evaporated.

I stood up and listened. There was not a sound. Presently my eye caught sight of a rough, broad-stepped ladder that led to a door high up in the wall, giving entrance to the rooms upstairs. I walked to the foot of it.

"*They hide like rats in these places*."

There was no help for it. Duty, which so often is an elusive matter, stares one in the face in times of war. There was no doubt about its being my duty to go up that ladder—and up I crept.

The door at the top was bolted. I tried it gently at first. It creaked. If there was anyone inside the room he would have heard. You can't employ the methods of a burglar for these jobs. There is no such thing as dainty work in war. I fixed my muscles, and went for It with my shoulder.

Two blows— It was a match-board door— and it burst open. I fell flat on my face into the room. It was about the best thing I could have done, and I had the sense to lie there for a moment with ears pricked, listening— listening for something. There was not a sound. I flatter myself I scarcely made a noise as I rose to my feet, and there I stood, with a match ready, as I had done before, listening— still listening.

Then, suddenly, the sweat broke out over me; my heart started thumping, like the piston-rod of an old donkey-engine. I had heard a noise. It was the uneven breathing of something that lived; the jerky inhalation of breath, the pregnant pause while the breath was held, then the sudden exhalation, as of someone in a tight corner trying to keep quiet as I. There was a moment before I struck that match. My fingers wore numbed. If I was going to be

plugged with a bullet it was such a cold-blooded way of doing it. I was compelled to give the signal for my own execution.

In the midst of that pause came Galloway's voice, Impatient at waiting down below.

"Well, is there anyone?" he called out.

I made no answer. Tho amount of stimulation that danger brings to your wits is amazing. I had to strike that match. That was quite enough for me. He called out again. Then I struck it.

Up it whisked into the air— a little spurt of blue — and I was crouching in a corner, my heart beating a tattoo like a band of kettledrums. But no report— not even a stir. All my pulses were throbbing so that I could not distinguish tho sound of breathing any longer. For the moment it might even have stopped. In another moment I had a second match lighted, and was gazing— like a ghost, I shouldn't be surprised— round an empty room. There were two beds, quite lately slept in, the clothes flung off them as though the owners had just got up. But as for human beings there were none. Then how about the breathing? I was certain of hearing that.

I looked about me. Ah, there was another door at the far end— another door like the one I had just broken down. I threw my match away and stepped on tip-toe across tho room. I took a breath, lifted the latch, and pushed. This door was open. It seemed then the most crucial moment of all. Inside it was as black as pitch. It might have been a large room or a small one. I could not see an inch in front of my nose, and there I stood in the entrance, debating what to do. Well, What can you do? I felt for matches. There were two more.

"They hide like rats in these places."

Well, then, I had to draw their teeth, and the sooner the better. I got my revolver ready and listened.

This time the breathing was plainer than before. "*Niff— nuff*!" I tried to locate where it was. In the darkness it was impossible. Wherever I turned it seemed to be there. This was what I had heard from the other room. If I could have located it I would have fired; but to fire meant exposure, and if I did not hit, then the Lord help me. I preferred to rely on the match to draw his fire first.

At last I found a surface for my match, and, holding my revolver ready, I struck. It cracked, snapping like a whip, but did not light. I shifted my position. There was strategy in the cracking of that match that did not light. I pictured the poor wretch squatting in a corner, with his pistol levelled at the spot from which the sound had come. I pictured him and grinned. When I had found another surface for the friction I required I caressed the trigger of my shooter and struck again.

Up went the little blue rocket as I tumbled in a heap to my knees. Then there was a report that burst like a shell into the silence as I lay still in a heap in the corner. I saw the glow in the room of the white spit of the flame, yet could not see where it had come from. Then all was still again. Everything In my mind was confusion. If I was hit, I did not feel it. Immediately followed the rushing of feet, a couple of our fellows coming up. I could see the rays of their lantern striking into the other room as they stumbled up that shaking ladder. But all that time I dared not move; I dared not speak; I scarcely dared to breathe. My position was cramped; I was tied in a knot just as I fell, my hands still gripping my revolver ready to shoot, my heart thumping, my eyes peering, strained Into the darkness, prepared for the first ray of light to give me aim.

At last they came stumbling across the other room. The rays of their lantern stole in through the open door. I held a breath, and then, as they entered, revealing the whole scene to my straining eyes, I saw that the room was vacant. In my hand was my revolver, still smoking, and I could hear my own breath rattling between my teeth.

15: The Sovereign in the Gutter.

E. Phillips Oppenheim

1866-1946

Sun (NSW), 2 July 1910

The Strand Magazine, Nov 1909

I don't think has been collected in any Oppenheim short story collection, and possibly not republished since its first appearance.

IT WAS OVER at last, the five days' *cause célèbre*, the five days' long-drawn-out agony. To the man who sat alone upon the hard bench fixed close to the whitewashed wall of the little cell the whole thing seemed, now that it was over, very much like a dream. He was plunged once more into solitude. The distant sounds came to his ears in a sort of muffled chaos. The crowded court with its insufferable atmosphere; the white, parchment-like face of the judge; the bewigged barristers with their strange callousness, their slight jests, their artificial earnestness, the sea of closely-packed faces extending even to the door; the face of friends, acquaintances, enemies— all seemed, now that the curtain had fallen, as though they were but images of what might have been, as though they never had— never could have had— any real existence.

And then the story— the hateful, impossible story twisted and turned against him at every point, the lies of another man put into his mouth, the evil deeds of his partner heaped upon his shoulders. His first sense of fierce martyrdom had burned away into ashes through the furnace of those long days of toriure and suffering. The resuit had come at last scarcely even as a blow. The horror of it had: been discounted a hundred times over, discounted by all those curious, mimical faces, the scathing words of tne prosecuting barrister— a member of his club, once a guest at his house-discounted even by the cold, carefully-balanced words of the judge himself, so studiously impartial, weightily censorious. It seemed to him that nothing remained— no pain, no loneliness, no humiliation. His senses were steeped in a sort of torpor. He bareiy conscious of the-opening of his door, of the entrance of the visitor, fresh from the court, who was sitting now by his side in grave silence.

"I am very sorry, indeed, sir," Harewood, the lawyer was saying, "that the case went so badly. Personally I am quite convinced that a serious injustice has been done. If Carelton had only been alive, he would have been able to clear you in many ways. Without his evidence the Court, of course, have assumed that you shared equally with him in his peculations and rash schemes."

The convicted man made no reply. He appeared, indeed, almost to have lost the power of speech. The solicitor, who was really exceedingly sorry for his client, and honestly believed him guilty of little more than the folly of a

pleasure-loving man of the world who has left his affairs to an unscrupulous partner, tried to impart a consoling note to his next speech.

"The sentence," he declared, "was far too severe. I have heard it universally condemned. I can assure you that we do not intend to let the matter remain here. There will be a petition to the Home Secretary, and I believe I may say that it will be signed by the principal counsel for the prosecution. In the meantime, if you have any messages, you will be allowed to see your wife for a few minutes. And as to letters—"

There was a considerable space of wooden bench between the two men and Harewood's fist suddenly smote it a terrible blow.

"Enough!" he said. "The thing is finished— my life is finished! I have no wife— no children! I wish to see no one. I will see no one."

"Mr. Harewood!" the lawyer protested. A sudden fire flashed in the eyes of the convicted man.

"Silence!" he ordered. "You did your best. I am grateful. For the rest, I repeat that what has happened takes me out of this world as surely as death itself. You can tell my people that from me. They had better make their minds up to it, for it is inevitable. My wife is a widow, and my children fatherless. I suppose there is a little money left somewhere. They must shift for themselves, as well as they can. But as for visits or letters, no! Not the thinnest thread shall bind me to the past when once I enter the convict prison. Under-stand that finally."

"In a few months time—," the lawyer began, soothingly.

"In a few months time," Harewood repeated, "things will be with me exactly as they are now. I have been hardly judged, perhaps, yet according to my strict deserts. Mine was the sin of omission. I left Carelton to play ducks and drakes with our client's money while I enjoyed life in my own way. I trusted Carelton and I had no right to trust him, or any man, with other people's money. It was more than foolish— it was wicked. I admit the justice of my sentence. I am prepared to pay."

"With regard to Mrs. Harewood—," the lawyer recommenced.

"So far as I am concerned," the convicted man interrupted, "there is no such person. Let her understand that, and let my children understand it. God himself could not blot out these last five days, or the memory of them. They have come and gone like an avalanche, and they have swept me from the face of the earth. You understand?" he wound up, rising to his feet at the sound of a key in the door. "Letters I shall not open. Visitors I will not receive. I shall enter the convict prison without a name, and if ever I leave it I shall leave it with-out a name."

"You will leave it a good deal before fifteen years," the lawyer declared.

"As to that I am indifferent," Harewood answered. "Indifferent, that is to say," he added, slowly, "save for one thing."

"Your children?" the lawyer murmured.

"No," Harewood answered, with a note of repressed passion in his tone; "the children of Stephen Carelton!"

THE SOVEREIGN lay on the edge of the kerb-stone, half hidden by a little sprinkling of dust. Carelton's companion pointed it out to him.

"Your sovereign, Stephen," he remarked. "Lucky fellow, as usual! A few more rolls and it would have gone down the drain."

Carelton stood on the middle of the pave-ment looking at the spot where the glitter-ing edge of the coin was clearly visible. He made no motion to pick it up. His friend looked at him in surprise.

"I know you're a veritable Croesus, Stephen," he remarked, "making money hand over fist, and all the rest of it, but I pre-sume you don't intend to leave that sovereign for the sweepers?"

The young man drew a cigarette-case from his pocket, and, selecting one, tapped it against the side and calmly lit it.

"For the sweepers, my dear Cyril," he answered, "I think not. To tell you the truth, I believe that providence has some other destination in view for that luckless coin. This is the fourth time within the last five minutes that I have dropped it."

His companion adopted a practical attitude.

"Why don't you keep your gold in your waistcoat pocket?" he suggested. "You are missing the whole point of my statement."

Carelton declared. "I am convinced that it was not carelessness alone which caused that coin to drop from my fingers twice in the taxi-cab and twice when I sought for that loose silver to pay the man. Depend upon it, Cyril. Fate has its own use for that sovereign. I am clearly dispossessed."

His friend looked at him doubtfully. Carelton was a man of whims; but surely this was absurd!

"You can't mean," he said, "that you are going to leave it there?"

"Precisely what I do mean, my dear fellow," Carelton answered. "Come into the club and stand in the bay window. We shall be able to see the person whom Fortune has taken under her wing."

"There is not the slightest doubt about it," his friend remarked, decisively, "that you are more or less a fool, Stephen."

"I hope so," Carelton declared, fervently. "This world was not made for wise men. The workhouses and prisons are full of them. Come inside, Cyril,

there's a good fellow. I am really interested to see into whose hands my sovereign is fated to pass."

The two men stood in the bay window of the club and watched.

Stephen Carelton was tall and dark, with pale face, humorous mouth, and keen, grey eyes deep-set under his level eyebrows. He was still a young man, but ten years of exceptionally hard work, successful though it had been, had left its traces upon his features. Cyril Hanneford, his companion, was a man of slighter physique, more carefully dressed, a person of less marked characteristics, a loiterer amongst the byways of life, in the broad thoroughfares of which Carelton had already found for himself a place.

As regards this particular incident, however, the two seemed to have changed identities. Carelton the practical man of affairs, had yielded to the idlest of superstitions. Hanneford, the person to whom such things might well have seemed likely to appeal, was adopting the pose and tone of a cynic.

"A sovereign," he remarked, looking out upon the pavement, "is relatively a small sum. Yet, after all, my dear Stephen, there are possibilities about it. It is the price of a bottle of wine, a basket of violets for your good-looking typist, a stall at the Opera, a tip to a maitre d'hotel. You might, even," he added, "entertain me modestly to luncheon upon that sum. And behold, there it lies," he wound up, pointing out of the window, "chucked away as a thing of no worth, left there to gratify the vaguest of superstitions. Upon my word, I've a good mind to go out and fetch it my-self!"

"Don't talk rot, Cyril," Carelton declared, good-humoredly. "Stay here with me instead and watch for the lucky person. See, there is someone coming now."

A boy went by with a parcel under his arm, whistling loudly, with his eyes fixed upon the windows of the great club. He did not even look upon the pavement. Then there came a couple of men arm in arm, talking intently as though engrossed upon some matter of business. They, too, passed on without a downward glance. A woman leading a dog by a string followed, but she only looked at the ground to admire the elegance of her well-shod feet. A beggar-woman came slowly along and Carelton found it hard work to prevent his friend from rushing out.

"If someone's going to pick it up," he protested, "why not that poor woman? It looks as though it might do her a bit of good."

Carelton held his arm.

"If it is meant for her, she will see it," he declared.

"You are not such a superstitious ass," Hanneford demanded, "as to believe—"

"I believe nothing," Carelton assured him. "Only I contend that Chance, which some times brought that particular coin from my pocket shall choose the person into whose hands it shall pass."

"To judge by his walk, then here he comes," Hanneford declared. "He's got his eyes glued on the pavement all right. Two to one he'll see it! No, he's going by! By jove, he's stopped. He's got it Stephen! Did you see him pick it up? You can say good by to your sovereign now, old man. He doesn't look the sort of chap to part easily."

Carelton was watching eagerly the face of the man who after a covert glance around, was preparing to quit the scene. He was certainly not a person of prepossessing appearance; but, on the other hand, his clothes and general air seemed to indicate the fact of his belonging to that class to whom a sovereign is a distinct consideration. He was of powerful build, thin but sinewy, with hard, weather-stained face and undistinguished slouch. He wore a ready-made suit of clothes, and he carried no gloves or stick. Yet there was something about him a little different from the ordinary wayfarer, something which excited the curiosity of both men as they watched him hurry off.

"The sort of man, that, who would take a great deal of placing," Carelton remarked, Thoughtfully. "He was no ordinary waster, I'm sure."

"It's good bye to your sovereign, at any rate," Hanneford laughed. "Hadn't you better order those whiskies and sodas?"

THE MAN with a sovereign gripped in his hand passed down the street and disappeared. There was a curious lack of vitality about him and the way he moved. His walk was a tired plod— a physical action which seemed purely mechanical. If he brushed the sleve of a passer-by, he strted as though alarmed, and shrank away. Notwithstanding his somewhat forbidding appearance, he had an air which was almost timid. An acute physiognomist might easily have placed him. His where the mannerisms and deportmont of a man finding himself once more amongst his fellows after a long period of solitude.

He reached the Strand and pursued his way steadily along as far as Chancery-lane. Here he turned into a little square and came to a sudden standstill before a venerable pile of offices. Then, for the first time since he had stooped to pick up that sovereign, the light swept across his face. Exactly opposite to him was a large brass plate on which was engraved the name of Mr. Stephen Carelton, Junior, with a list of legal distinctions in smaller type The place had an undoubtedly thriving appearance.

Through the white blinds of the offices he could see rows of clerks. There were visitors coming and going all the time— barristers' clerks with silk hats and small black bags, and others more obviously clients.

The man stood there for several minutes, motionless. His lips were slightly parted, his face had gradually become hard and cruel. He spoke to himself for the first time.

"Mr. Stephen Carelton, Junior!" he muttered; "the boy who was at Oxford. It is well that one of them is alive."

He hesitated for a moment as though about to enter the offices. Then he looked at the sovereign in his hand and changed his mind. Slowly he turned round to face another shock before he had taken half a dozen steps. A carriage was drawn up close to the kerb in Chancery-lane. A woman with up-lifted skirts was in the act of descending from it. She was tall, graceful, and young; fashionably dressed, with pleasant smile and clear brown eyes, which rested for a moment upon the man who was staring at her. She was suddenly perplexed. A frown wrinkled her forehead. She even stood still in the middle of the pavement. The man shuffled on, and her eyes followed him. Then she went on her way slowly.

She entered the offices of Mr. Stephen Carelton, Junior, with a puzzled frown lingering upon her face.

Harewood strode on towards the Strand, with the fires of hate suddenly loosed within him, the yearning of a moment changed al-ready to that passionate desire to kill which for many years had been all that had re-mained to him of sensation. He came to a standstill in front of a small shop in the Strand, where various secondhand articles were for sale He looked in at the window, and after a casual glance entered the shop.

"How much for the small revolver?" he asked. The shopman took it from the window and examined it.

"Fifteen and sixpence," he answered, laying it upon the counter, "Nice little weapon, as good as new."

Harewood took it up and examined it.

"What about cartridges?" he asked.

"You'll have to buy those at a gunsmith's," the man told him; "but there are three or four here somewhere which came with it. You can have them, if you like."

He rummaged about for several minutes and produced them at last from a large box filled with oddments. "They've been lying her for some time," he remarked, "but I expect you'll find them all right."

Harewood inserted them in the chambers of the revolver, thrust it into his pocket, and placed the sovereign upon the table. The storeman handed him fore and sixpence.

"I woundn't carry it like that if I were your," he advised. "A loaded revolver's no too safe a thing to have loose in the pocket."

Harewood nodded, but left the palce without making any answer.

In the street he was conscious of a sudden giddiness. He stopped short for a moment, and remembered that as yet he had tasted no food that day. His hand was shaking like a drunken man's.

Reluctantly he crossed the road and entered a small eating-house. It was a waste of time, this, but it was necessary. When he emerged half an hour later, he walked with a new decision and with more rapid foot-steps.

In a few moments he had found his wan once more to the little square of Chancery-lane, and, presenting himself at the offices of Mr. Stephen Carelton, Junior, made his inquiry at the clerk's desk.

"Mr. Stephen Carelton has just come in from lunch, sir," the boy told him. "Have you an appointment?"

"Yes," Harewood answered.

The youth took up a book and glanced down it searchingly.

"We don't seem to have any record of an appointment with anyone of your name," he remarked. "When was it made?"

"A long time ago," Harewood answered, grimly; ''perhaps before you were in a position to record it. Tell Mr. Carelton that Mr. Harewood wishes to see him at once."

The name, audible this time to the other clerks, elicited a slight stir of interest, but it did not occur to anyone to connect the speaker with the head of the firm.

After a brief delay Harewood was shown upstairs. Trembling a little at the knees, he passed along the familiar way. Soon he was ushered into the private office which had once been his. Stephen Carelton looked up and greeted him with a brief nod.

"You wished to see me, I understand?" he said. "I am Mr. Stephen Carelton. I did not quite catch your name."

The boy had disappeared and closed the door behind him. Hrewood calmly seated himself in the empty chair opposite to the young lawyer.

"My name is Harewood," he announced. T

hey looked at one another across the table. Stephen Carleton's expression was at first on of puzzled doubt. Suddenly a light seemed to break in upon him.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "You are Julian Harewood?"

"Julian Harewood— yes!" The younger man held out his hand.

"You have taken us completely by surprise, sir," he said. "Allow me to say, however, that I am very glad to see you. We had no idea that— that you would be here so soon. Your behavior as to letters has been a little extraordinary, you know."

Harewood looked at the outstretched hand as though at some poisonous thing. Carelton slowly withdrew it.

"You're not going to bear malice against me, I hope, Mr. Harewood?" he said, frankly. "I know that my father used you ill, but it was before my time. know, too—"

"Be quiet!" Harewood ordered. He drew the revolver from his pocket and fingered it almost affectionately.

"I was released from prison early this morning," he said, slowly. "I had only one desire when I came out; I have had only one desire all the time I have been a prisoner, and that was that I might kill you, or anyone else who bore your name, before night."

"What have I done to injure you, Mr. Harewood?" the young man asked calmly.

"You are your father's son," Harewood answered. "Look at me. I am the broken-down wreck of a man, the shell of a man in whom the heart and the soul are dead. I am what your father made me. Fortunately for him, he is dead. Unfortunately for you, you are alive, Stephen Carelton's son, inded! I, too, had children. What has become of them God only knows! A wife— she is dead, I hope. Say your prayers quickly, young man. A word will have to do. A few hour ago I was terrified lest I should lack the strength of this thing. I feared that I might have to kill you with my hands. Chance sent me the money to buy this," he added, patting the revolver; "a blessed chance. My curses on you, Stephen Carelton!"

He raised the revolver, and, pointing it deliberately at the other's heart, pulled the trigger. There was an empty click. He tried once more. Again the fall of the hammer upon some unresponsive substance. Carelton, who had been paralysed by the unexpectedness of the attack, sprang up and gripped his assailant's wrists so that the revolver fell on to the office table.

"Harewood!" he exclaimed. "My God, are you mad?"

Harewood answered nothing. He seemed suddenly turned into stone. The failure of his weapon was a thing uncontemplated— an unimaginable catastrophe. He suffered himself to be pushed back into his chair. Carelton looked at him wonderingly.

"I know you now!" he exclaimed. "You are the man who picked up my sovereign in Pall Mall! Is this what you bought with it?" he asked, pointing to the revolver.

"Yes!" Harewood answered, mechanically, "that and a meal. I wish I had never seen the sovereign, I should have killed you then, sure enough."

The young man felt his forehead. He was scarcely surprised to discover that it was wet.

"Mr. Harewood," he said, "if you had killed me you would have killed your son-in-law. I was married to Louise two years ago. I know that my father treated you badly, but I have done all that I can to make up for it. And so far as regards the business, why, I have been more successful than I deserved even. There's money for you and a new life, and there isn't one of your people, or even your old friends, who won't be glad to see you. There isn't a soul who hasn't come to the conclusion that your sentence was ridiculously severe, and for the last twelve months there has been quite a series of agitations for your release. It's your own fault that we haven't been able to let you know. We've tried every means in vain. One moment."

He walked to the door of an inner room and called to somebody. Harewood pressed the barrel of the revolver against his own temple.

"One of them must be good," he muttered. He pulled the trigger—again the empty click.

"One more— the last one!" he whispered to himself, and stiffened his finger.

Suddenly the weapon was wrenched from his hand. He turned swiftly round. The girl whom he had seen stepping from the carraige was there on her knees by his side; her arms were around his neck; marvellous, incredible words were pouring from her lips, her cheek, even her lips themselves were pressed to his. He rocked in his chair. There was a lump in his throat, burning fire behind his eyes. The years were falling away with the hot tears— nothing could stop them now. It was a nightmare which had passed.

CARELTON walked to the window which overlooked the square, with the revolver in his hand. He pulled the trigger idly. It went off at once with a loud report. He stood gazing at it in amazement. It was the fourth cartridge which had been good! Through the little cloud of smoke he seemed to see the sovereign lying in the gutter below.

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