PAST MASTERS 165

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PAST MASTERS 165

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

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1: A Delicate Affair

George A. Birmingham

(James Owen Hannay, 1865-1950)

Gaiety, Oct 1922

THE long train backed slowly up to the platform of the Interlaken station at half-past three o'clock in the afternoon. Near the front of it was a coach labelled 'Paris'.

On the platform, among other travellers, was Cyril Elliot, a tall, wholesome-looking young Englishman, dressed in rough grey tweed. He carried a strong, spiked stick, an ice-axe, a camera and a waterproof coat. He had been climbing, and most of the skin was peeled off his nose. Behind him was a porter carrying a heavy suitcase.

'Paris, sir, first-class,' said the porter, who spoke excellent English.

'*Nach Paris*,' said Cyril. '*Premiere Classe*.'

He hated being addressed in English by foreigners. As he was not sure what the porter's native language was, he gave him a choice of two. Cyril, who was in the Foreign Office, spoke French and German, both very badly.

'This way, sir,' said the porter.

The coach labelled 'Paris' had first-class compartments at one end, second-class compartments at the other, and, in the middle, a single compartment marked 'Lits Salon'. Cyril, who had travelled a little, knew the sleeping-cars of the International Company and the berths provided by the French State Railways for those who want to lie down and are prepared to pay for the luxury. The Lits Salon of this railway company was new to him, but it sounded like sleeping accommodation of some kind. Cyril had a night journey before him. He had been up that morning at three o'clock and had climbed the Schildhorn to see the sunrise. It seemed to him that the Lits Salon, whatever it might be, would be preferable to the ordinary first-class compartment.

The English-speaking porter was helpful, and fetched the station-master. The station-master, who did not speak English, disclaimed all knowledge of the Lits Salon, how it was to be engaged or whether it was already taken. He agreed, after receiving a franc from Cyril, to telephone to Berne and find out. The result was satis- factory. There were three places in the Lits Salon. Two of them were engaged and would be occupied by travellers who would get into the train at Berne. The third was at Cyril's disposal if he chose to pay twenty francs for it. He paid and took possession.

While the train wandered along the shores of Lake Thun he examined the Lits Salon. It seemed at first sight to be simply an unusually wide first-class compartment with three seats in it. But, by an ingenious arrangement, the back of each seat could be pulled down in such a way as to form a comfortable sofa, fully six feet long, stretching across the compartment. Tucked in behind the swinging back were a couple of pillows. Cyril congratulated himself on the prospect of a comfortable night. He would even be able to wash and shave in the morning, for the Lits Salon had its private lavatory opening off it. He settled down, lit his pipe, and fell to wondering what his two fellow-travellers would be like.

The train reached Berne and Cyril looked out on to the platform with some curiosity. An English parson and his wife hurried towards Cyril's carriage. They looked cheerful, friendly people, and he hoped they might be the tenants of the vacant couches. But they passed on. Two Frenchmen, heavily laden with bags, got into the coach and struggled along the corridor. They looked in at Cyril and then passed by. Several other travellers passed and got in elsewhere. Cyril began to hope that his promised companions might have missed the train and that he would have the whole Lits Salon to himself. He leaned out of the window and saw two ladies far down the platform. They were Americans. He knew that because he could hear their voices, and it is only the voice of an American woman which carries half the length of a crowded railway platform and rises superior to the noise of the engine. These ladies had laid hold of an official in a gold-laced cap, and were demanding to be led to the sleeping-berths which they had engaged. Cyril shivered slightly. They looked like women of strong character and great determination. He could easily fancy their voting fiercely that America should go dry. It seemed quite likely that they would object to his smoking. They would certainly frown, perhaps even lecture him, if he drank the brandy-and-water he had in his flask.

The official in the gold-laced cap led the two American ladies along the platform, helped them to climb into the Paris coach, pushed open the door of the Lits Salon, and invited them to enter. Then he fled, untipped, probably very glad to escape. The two ladies stood in the corridor and glared ferociously at Cyril. He knocked the ashes out of his pipe. His worst fears were realized. They certainly objected to smoking.

'What we paid for,' said one of the ladies, 'was a sleeping-car. Where is it?'

'I shall speak to the conductor at once,' said the other lady.

But she could not speak to the conductor or any other official, for the train started.

'This is not a sleeping-car,' said the first lady.

She looked Cyril straight in the face while she spoke and he felt that he was bound to make some reply.

'It's not a regular Wagon Lits,' he said politely, 'but I think it's fairly comfortable. Just let me show you how it works.'

He stood up, shifted his books and papers, and pulled down the back of his seat, displaying the sofa and pillows.

'It's not so bad,' he said, 'once you understand how it goes.'

'This,' said the first lady, 'is abominable. I call it an outrage.'

'They won't be able to believe it,' said the other, 'when we write home and tell them, and I shall make a point of writing to all the papers to describe how we have been treated.'

Cyril, standing by the couch he had unfolded, failed to understand their indignation. He had more than once spent a night in an American Pullman car, and it seemed to him that the accommodaticn offered by the French railway company was greatly superior.

'Oh,' he said apologetically, 'it's not so bad really.'

'And are you going to sleep in the third bed?' said the elder of the two Americans.

Then suddenly Cyril understood. He had heard stories of the extreme modesty and delicacy of American ladies, especially elderly spinsters, but he had never quite believed all that he had heard. Now he realized that He was very young, in many ways very innocent. He blushed hotly.

'Of course,' he said apologetically, 'one doesn't undress, you know. One simply lies down. I give you my word of honour I won't take off a single thing except my hat. I won't even unlace my boots if you'd rather I didn't.'

That was a hard promise to make. Cyril's boots were heavy, nail-studded, meant for climbing. He had looked forward to taking them off. But his self-denial merely made things worse. The two ladies looked at him as if he had deliberately insulted them. Then they stalked off to the far end of the corridor, refusing even to enter the Lits Salon.

Cyril was left alone, in physical comfort, for he had the whole compartment to himself, most uncomfortable in mind, for he could not decide what he ought to do. It seemed impossible to calm the outraged modesty of the two ladies. He did not think they would accept him as a fellow-traveller even if he offered to put on his waterproof and wear it all night. He might, of course, give up his place in the Lits Salon; but he had paid very nearly a pound for it and he wanted very much to lie down and get some sleep. Besides, he altogether failed to appreciate the ladies' point of view. If there is nothing indelicate about sitting up all night in a railway compartment which is also occupied by a

strange man, there ought not to be anything very outrageous about lying down under the same conditions.

The train went slowly past the lake of Neuchatel, stopping every ten minutes or so at wayside stations. At each station the voices of the two American ladies reached Cyril, and he could not help hearing what they said. They were discussing their grievance, and were exceedingly angry with the French nation, the railway company, and especially with him. At one station he heard them say that no American gentleman would have forced himself into the sleeping-apartment of two ladies. At the next station he heard himself described as a 'boil' and a 'blister'. The exact point of these names was obscure to him, but they made him feel acutely uncomfortable. He had once suffered from a boil, and quite lately, while climbing, from blisters. If his presence affected the American ladies in such ways, he quite understood their disliking him. At last he could stand it no more. He dragged his suitcase and other belongings into the corridor, approached the two ladies hat in hand, and offered to surrender his place in the Lits Salon.

They did not even thank him. In fact, they seemed inclined to blame him for holding out so long, and for keeping them standing for nearly two hours in the corridor.

He found a seat in a compartment which was not very full, securing a corner opposite a young Englishman. At the other end of the compartment was a Frenchman, with a little daughter, a child too young to have developed the extremer forms of modesty. He was comfortable enough for a time, but he had the whole night before him, and there was evidently not the faintest hope of being able to lie down.

At about ten o'clock, just before the train reached Pontarlier, a guard came round and looked at the tickets. He discovered that Cyril was entitled to a place in the Lits Salon, and told him so politely. Cyril replied that he had surrendered his place out of respect for the feelings of the two American ladies. Instead of applauding his chivalry, the guard told him firmly that he must go back to his proper place. The seat in the compartment which Cyril occupied might be wanted at Pontarlier, and unless he chose to pay for another first-class ticket to Paris he could not stay where he was. Cyril reasoned with the man, but quite vainly. He dwelt at length on his unwillingness to outrage the feelings of the American ladies. The guard cared nothing about their feelings. He explained that the ladies would probably abuse him all night if he went back. The guard, who was becoming impatient, did not mind whether they did or not. The utmost concession that Cyril could win from him was permission to stay where he was until the train reached

Pontarlier. After that he must go back to the Lits Salon or pay for an extra ticket.

The Englishman who sat opposite Cyril was deeply interested in the discussion. When the guard left he began to ask questions.

'Are they very objectionable?' he asked.

'Who?' said Cyril. ' The American ladies? Oh, no. Not particularly. That's to say, they wouldn't be if they didn't talk at me in the way they do.'

'I suppose they wouldn't do you any actual harm,' said the other— 'stick a pair of scissors into your eye, or hammer a nail into your head while you were asleep, like that woman in the Bible ?'

'I shouldn't think so,' said Cyril. 'But they'd talk.'

'I'll risk it if you like,' said the young man. 'You give me your ticket for the Lits Salon and I'll let you have my place here in exchange. The guard can't object to that.'

Cyril, who was really afraid of the two ladies, was willing enough to make the exchange; but he felt it only fair to warn his new friend of what he might expect.

'They called me a boil and a blister,' he said, 'and they said that no American gentleman— indeed, no gentleman of any kind— would force himself into their carriage. They said a lot of other nasty things, and you can't help hearing them, no matter how far off you are. They'll say far worse things to you.'

'I hope not,' said the other. 'You see, I've met a lot of Americans travelling about in Europe, and I rather flatter myself I know how to manage them.'

At Pontarlier there was a long delay while the Customs officers examined the luggage and the police officials looked at the passports. When at last the train was ready to start, Cyril slipped meekly into the compartment with the Frenchman and his little daughter. The other young Englishman went confidently into the Lits Salon without even tapping at the door.

Next morning about six o'clock, half an hour before the train arrived in Paris, Cyril went into the corridor to stretch his legs. He was joined in a few minutes by the man to whom he had given his place in the Lits Salon. Cyril was grubby and dishevelled. The other man looked fresh, clean, well shaved, and had evidently spent a comfortable night.

'Well?' said Cyril. 'How did you get on? Did they abuse you much?'

'Abuse me! Good Lord, no. They welcomed me, fed me with grapes and biscuits, offered me smelling salts and eau-de-Cologne, for my fevered brow. Abuse me! They'd have kissed me if I'd asked them to. But I rather shrank from that. I told you I knew how to manage American women, especially those from

the Middle West, and these two hail from St. Louis or some Godforsaken spot like that.'

'I wish,' said Cyril, 'you'd tell me how you managed.'

'Simply introduced myself,' said the other. 'Told them I was Lord Archibald Chandos-Effingham, that my mother was the Duchess of Portarlington and my father second cousin to the Prince of Wales.'

'But,' said Cyril, a little puzzled, 'are you all that?'

'None of it,' said the other. 'Not one single bit. As a matter of fact, my name is Thompson and I'm a stockbroker. But I knock about a good deal and I'm always running up against Americans. They're a democratic people, thoroughly democratic, and so there's nothing they love so much as a title. Now if you'd only thought of saying that you'd a handle to your name—'

'As a matter of fact,' said Cyril, 'my father is a peer, and I can call myself Lord Cyril Elliot if I like. But, of course, that's only a courtesy title.'

'Well, I'm damned,' said the other, 'and you never thought of telling them. What's your line of life?'

'I'm in the Foreign Office,' said Cyril.

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2: The Wreckers of St. Agnes

Anonymous

In: *Tales of Terror*, Boston, 1848

THERE ARE FEW parts of England more wild and desolate than the mining districts of Cornwall. Nature, as a counterpoise to the treasures which she has lavished on this region of her bounty, has imparted to its features a most forbidding aspect. Bleak and barren plains, unenlivened by vegetation, with neither tree nor shrub to protect the traveller from the wind that sweeps across their surface, and danger in every step, from the innumerable shafts by which they are intersected.

It is truly an inhospitable country; and the nature of the inhabitants seems quite in accordance with its unfriendly characteristics— repulsive and ungainly in appearance, disgusting and ferocious in manner, cruel by nature, and treacherously cunning. Not a step have they gained from the barbarous state of their savage ancestors. I allude more particularly to the town and district of St. Agnes, near Truro, and its people. St. Agnes is a small place, situated on the coast of Cornwall about ten miles from Truro, across one of those sterile plains, almost covered with the refuse of mines, and perforated in every direction, like a gigantic rabbit-warren. The road, so called, through this waste, is little better than a track, which it would be difficult and dangerous to traverse, without a guide. Many a wanderer has found a nameless grave, by venturing rashly across those dreary moors.

It was late in the autumn when I visited St. Agnes, and it was towards the close of a gloomy day that I found myself at the residence of Captain Thomas, so I shall call him, whose acquaintance I had made in London, and who had succeeded in persuading me, that, the only sure way to make a fortune was, by investing a trifle of ready money in a copper-mine. He held the rank of captain by the custom of the country, as a mine is conducted, like a ship, by a captain and officers. The captain was rather a decent specimen of his caste; for, where all are combinations of the miner, smuggler, wrecker, and, consequently, ruffian, a man even of decent manners is something. He had one fault, however, which I afterwards discovered:— He would have considered it a most meritorious employment, to have robbed even his own father, rather than not to have robbed at all.

Our repast being over, and I, like a witless booby, having invested my bank-notes in his pouch, in exchange for certain bits of paper he was pleased to call shares; and having received from him, in addition to such valuable considerations, the most nattering congratulations on the prospect of immediate wealth, he proposed an adjournment to the "Red Dragon," or red

something ; I almost forget, it is so long since; where he assured me I should meet a most respectable society, and where I might pick up much valuable information. They were all particular friends of his— captains and pursers of mines.

It was a dismal night. When we sallied out, a thick mist was gathering around; the sea was breaking against the huge rocky cliffs of the adjacent coast, with a deafening roar; and at intervals was heard the distant thunder. It was with no uncomfortable feeling, that I felt myself safely housed at the rendezvous of the choice spirits of the mines.

The party to which I was introduced was seated at a long deal table, in a spacious apartment, half kitchen, half tap-room ; at the upper end of which appeared a blazing fire, beneath a chimney-porch of a most ancient and approved formation. On one side of the room, a door opened into a small parlor, and in the corner was a little bar, for the host to dispense to his customers their various potations from his smuggled treasures. For, although it was not a trifle of Schidam or Cogniac that would satisfy these congregated worthies, I question whether the king tould afford to pay the salaries of the commissioners of excise, if the greater portion of his lieges were not more considerate customers than our friends of the "Red Dragon."

The arrival of Captain Thomas was hailed with marked satisfaction. We were soon seated, and in a twinkling a large tumbler of hot brandy and water was placed before me, and a pipe thrust into my hand. The conversation, which was rather loud when we entered, was now suddenly hushed, and intelligent glances were quickly interchanged, which I saw related to myself. Thomas understood it, and said, "You need not be afraid; that gentleman is a particular friend of mine, and a great patron of the mining arts."

I then begged to assure the company of my veneration for miners and mines, and all connected with them. There was a visible brightening up at this declaration, and doubtless at that moment various were the plans of swindling and rascality which shot through the stolid brains of that pleasant coterie to put my devotedness to the proof.

"A likely night this, Captain Thomas," said a beetle-browed, shock-headed, short, muscular man, whose small dark eyes peered from beneath a brow of peculiar ferocity.

"Uncommon likely!" returned the other, "and if we should have a bit of luck to-night, it would not be a bad beginning this winter."

"Ah!" said the former, who answered to the name of Knox, "my wife says she thinks Providence has deserted our coast we have n't had a godsend worth telling about these two years. I 've seen the time when we've had a matter of a dozen wracks in a season."

"Well, never mind, Master Knox," said a pert-looking, snub-nosed fellow, named Roberts, who I at first glance took for an attorney, but afterwards found that he was a mining-agent. From his more constant intercourse with Truro, he was rather better dressed than some of his companions; but his town breeding gave him no other advantage than a conceited, saucy air. "Never mind, Master Knox," said he, jingling a bunch of seals which peeped from beneath the waistcoat of that worthy, "you have made the most of your luck, and if you don't get any more you won't harm."

"Why, yes," said the fellow, drawing out a handsome gold watch, which accorded curiously with his coarse attire. "I don't complain of the past; and. yet I had a narrow escape with this; if it hadn't been for my boy Jem, I should have lost it."

"He 's a 'cute child, that boy of yours," remarked one.

"There never was a 'cuter. I'll tell you, sir," said he, addressing me. "It is two years ago, come December, on a Sunday, when we were all in church, that we had news of a wrack. Well, off we all started you may be sure, and the parson not the last, to see what it had pleased God to send us. We found on coming up, that, it was a French India-man. She had gone to pieces off the rocks, and the goods were floating about like dirt. I wasn'tlong in making the most of it ; and Jem was just going oft' for the cart, when I 'spied, half covered with weed, and hidden by a piece of, rock, the body of a Frenchman. I soon saw I had got a prize, for he was loaded with money and trinkets. These I quickly eased him of, seeing as he 'd never want 'em ; but to make sure, I hit 'un a good slap over the head just to see whether the life was in 'un or no." [Here one or two of the auditors grinned.]

"Well, I was just going away, when I see'd a diamond ring on his finger, and the finger being swelled with the water, I cuts it off" [displaying at the same time a knife of rather formidable proportions] "and walks off with my goods. I hadn't gone far, when little Jem runs after, crying, 'Dad, dad! hit 'un again dad! he grin'th, he grin'th!' I looked back, and sure enough that rascally French thief— whether it was drawing the blood or not, I don't know— but he was moving his arm about, and opening his eyes, as though he were bent on taking the bread out of my mouth. This put me in a precious rage— these Frenchmen are always a spiteful set, and hate Englishmen as they hate the devil. So I makes no more ado but I hits 'un a lick with the tail of a rudder laying close by, and I'll warrant me he never come to ask for my goods."

The miscreant chuckled over this horrid recital with all the self-satisfaction that another might feel at the recollection of a virtuous action ; whilst his companions, to whom no doubt the story was familiar, felt no other sensations of uneasiness at its recapitulation, than from the recollection that they had not

been able to do the same thing. Knox was evidently the ruffian par excellence. I beheld others around me, the expression of whose countenances would have hung, them at any bar in England without any other evidence; yet none ventured to boast of crime; Knox was the only open professor of villainy, and seemed to claim his right of pre-eminence. I have been in many parts of the world, and have encountered ruffians of every country and grade; but never before did I have the fortune to hear depravity, and of such a revolting character, so freely confessed, so unblushingly avowed.

"Well, Knox," said Thomas, after a short pause, "so you have seen Hibbert Shear. How 's poor Bill Trecuddick?"

Knox placed his finger significantly on his cheek.

"How," said the other, "dead!"

"Dead as mackerel," returned Knox; "you know I was in it, and a sharp brush we had. Poor Bill had three balls in him: he died the same night." A universal expression of sympathy followed this announcement, and various were the questions put by different individuals as to the details of his death. It appeared that he was killed in an engagement with a revenue cruiser.

"He was as likely a lad that ever run a cargo," said Thomas; "where did you bury him?"

"Along side of the gauger, I s'pose," said Roberts, who ventured a sidelong glance of malicious meaning, though apparently half doubtful of the consequences. I never saw so speedy a change in any human being as that remark produced in Knox. In an instant his brow became as black as the storm which now raged with appalling violence from without.

"What hast thee to do with that, thou pert, meddling coxcomb?" said he, as he fixed his black eyes, almost concealed by their overhanging brows, on the object of his wrath. "Now mark me, Master Roberts; play off no more of thy jokes on me. This is not the first time I have warned thee; but it shall be the last."

I learned afterwards that the gauger alluded to was Knox's half-brother, who was supposed to have met with his death by the hands of his relation, and his body flung down a shaft near the sea, now known by the name of the Gauger's Shaft. What confirmed the suspicion was that he was known to have frightful dreams about his murdered brother, and some said that he was known to tremble like a child if left alone at night. Be that as it might, however, a ferocious altercation was now proceeding between Knox and a friend of Roberts, who had replied to the other's threats, which appeared likely to proceed to serious consequences, had not the attention of all parties been diverted lay a loud and continued knocking at the outer door. This seemed so unusual an occurrence that the host hesitated to unbar, for never was a

stranger known to arrive at St. Agnes at such an hour, and on such a night too; for we heard the rain descend in torrents, and the thunder howling at intervals.

The knocking continued vehemently, and although we were too many to fear any thing like personal danger, yet I could see an evident though undefinable fear spreading throughout the party, sufficiently expressed by their anxious glances. In no one was such an expression more visible than in Knox. It was the result of some superstitious feeling, which the conversation of the night, and the awful storm now raging about them, had called into play.

The knocking was now fiercer than ever, and. the host was at last constrained to unbolt and unbar: the guest, whoever he was, would take no denial. As the door opened, in stalked a tall, weather-beaten looking man, enveloped in a huge shaggy great-coat, and a broad oil-skin hat on his head.

"What the devil dost thee mean by this?" he said, dashing his hat upon the floor, and shaking the rain from his coat like a huge water-dog,— "keeping a traveller outside your gates on such a night!" At this moment, during a lull in the storm, was heard a heavy booming sound from the sea.

"A wrack! a wrack!" shouted Knox; and instantly a dozen fellows were on their legs ready to rush forth like thirsty bloodhounds on their prey. "Keep your places, you fools!" cried the stranger, "if she goes ashore it will be many miles from here, with the wind in this quarter." They all seemed to acknowledge the justice of the remark, by sulkily resuming their places. "I 've heard the guns some time," continued the stranger; "but she has good offing yet, and she may manage to keep off. I 'd lay my life she is a foreign craft, they 're always in such a plaguey hurry to sing out." The company had leisure by this time, to seat themselves and resume their pipes. They likewise, seeing he was no ghost, took the liberty of scanning their guest. He was not very remarkable further than being a tall, muscular man, with short curling black hair, immense bushy whiskers, meeting under his chin, and large black eyes. Altogether it was not an unpleasant countenance. He did not apologize for his intrusion, but called at once for his pipe and his glass.

"Did you come from Truro side?" asked Knox. The stranger took a huge whiff, and nodded assent.

"Who might have brought you across the moors?"

"Dost thou think no one can tread the moors but thyself and the louts of St. Agnes?"

None that I ever heard of, except Beelzebub ;" said Knox, peering from beneath his brows suspiciously on the new comer.

The stranger laughed.

"The path is dangerous by night," said Thomas; "few strangers find the way alone."

"Then I am one of the few, for here I am," said he.

"I 've lived here man and boy these forty years," said Knox, " and I never knew a stranger do that before. And thou must be a stranger, for I 've never seen thee."

"Art sure of that?"— Knox again scanned him attentively.

"I never saw thee before."

"You see then a stranger can find his way in these parts. I came by the gauger's shaft. Thou know'st the gauger's shaft," said he significantly.

"Hell!" said the other furiously, "dost thou come here to mock me? If thou dost thou'dst better return afore harm comes of thee."

"Thou'rt a strong man," said his opponent; "but I 'm so much a stronger, that I would hold thee with one arm on yonder fire till thou wert as black as thy own black heart. Come, thou need'st not frown on me man, if thou hast a spark of courage I'll put it now to the test."

"Courage! I fear neither thee nor Beelzebub!

"I'll wager thee this heavy purse of French *louis d'ors* against that watch, and ring that befits thy finger so oddly, that thou durst not go into yonder room alone, and look on the face that shall meet thee there."

"Thou'rt a juggler and a cheat— I'll have nothing further to say to thee."

"There 's my gold," said he, throwing a heavy purse on the table; "look at it; count it; a hundred as bright louis as ever were coined in France, against thy watch and ring, not worth the half." The eyes of the wrecker glistened at the bright heap of gold. "What is the wager?" he demanded.

"If thou durst go into yonder room, that I will raise the form of one whom thou wouldst most dread to see."

"I fear nothing, and believe thee to be a cheat."

"There's my gold."

"Take the wager!" cried several of Knox's friends; "we'll see thou hast the gold."

"Done!" cried Knox, with a sort of desperate resolve, which the cheers of his friends, and the sight of the gold helped him to assume; and he placed the ring and watch on the heap of louis.

"I must have arms and lights."

"Take them," said the stranger: "but before you go, I will show you a portion of your property you have never discovered." He took up the ring, and touching the inside with the point of a pin a small aperture flew open, and disclosed a small space filled with hair. It was not till that moment it was discovered that the stranger had lost the little finger of the left hand! for a

moment all was still as the grave. A frightful feeling seemed to pervade the breast of every one around. It was as though the murdered stood before them to claim his own. The stranger broke into a loud laugh. "What the devil ails you all? are you afraid of a man without a finger?" and his laughter was louder than before.

"I'll not go into the room," said Knox, in a low, broken voice.

"Then the watch and ring are mine," said the stranger. "You have forfeited the wager;" and he began to fill the bag with the coin.

"It's a base juggle to rob me of my property," cried Knox, whose courage returned as he witnessed the unghostlike manner in which the stranger fingered the money.

"Keep to your wager, man," cried Thomas, "we'll see you rightly dealt, with. He can no more do what he says, than raise the prince of darkness himself."

"Will you stand to your bargain?" asked the stranger.

"I will; and defy the devil and all his works." He took a candle and a loaded pistol, and went towards the room. If ever the agony of a life were condensed into the short space of a few minutes, that was the time. Ruffian as he was, he was a pitiable object. Pale and trembling, without making an effort to conceal his distress, he paused and turned irresolute even at the threshold of the door. Shame and avarice urged him on. He entered the room and closed the door.

If I say that I looked on as a calm spectator of these proceedings, I should say falsely. I began to grow nervous, and was infected with the superstitious feeling which had evidently taken possession of my companions. The only unconcerned person was the stranger; at least, he was apparently so. He very coolly tied up the money, watch, and ring in the bag, and placed them on the table. He then took two pieces of paper, and wrote some characters on both; one he handed to Thomas: it was marked with the name of the gauger: the other he kept himself. He advanced to the fire, which was blazing brightly, and, muttering a few words, threw into it a small leaden pacquet, and retired at the same moment to the end of the room. The flames had hardly time to melt the thin sheet-lead, ere our ears were greeted with the most terrific and appalling explosion that I have ever in my life heard, and as though the elements were in unison, a deafening thunder crash shook the house to its very foundation. Every man was thrown violently to the ground; the chairs and tables tumbled about, as though imbued with life; every door was burst open by the shock, and hardly a pane of glass remained entire. This, with the screams of the women, and the groans of the men, if any one could withstand, without actual terror taking possession of his heart, he must be a bolder man than I was. For several minutes (for so it appeared to me) did we lie on the floor in this state, expecting, momentarily, the house to fall over us in ruins. All was, however,

silent as death, except the pealing of the thunder and the roaring of the storm; so that when the sense of suffocation was somewhat removed by the fresh air forcing through the open doors and windows, we ventured to hail each other.

It was sometime, however, before we could get a light; and that accomplished, our first care was to look to our friend in the back parlor. We found him lying on his face quite insensible, and bleeding from a wound in the head, which he must have received in falling. We brought him into the large room; and after a time, when people could be brought to their senses, we procured restoratives. I never shall forget the wild and ghastly look with which he first gazed around him. He looked around, as though seeking some horrid object.

"It 's gone," he cried; "thank God!— what a horrid sight!— who saw it?"

"Saw what? who?" asked Thomas.

"Just as bloody and ghastly, as when I pitched him down the shaft," cried he incoherently.

"Hush! hush!" said Thomas; Cs collect yourself— you don't know what you 're talking of."

"Who says I murdered him?" cried the miserable being before us. "Who says I got his money? He 's a liar, I say a liar. His money is sunk with him. Let 'em hang me— I am innocent.— They cannot prove it."

It became too distressing. Fortunately for the feelings of all, the unhappy man, or rather maniac, relapsed into insensibility, and in that state was conveyed home

It was not till then that we thought of the stranger. No trace of him could be found. The money, ring, and watch, had disappeared.

Strange were the rumors abroad the next day at St. Agnes. Some men going very early to work, averred they saw a horseman flying over the moors, crossing shafts and pits, without once staying to pick his way. It could have been no human horseman, nor steed, that could have sped on such a wild career. There was another report, which accounted for the appearance and disappearance of the stranger in another way. Some smugglers reported, that on that night they saw a beautiful French smuggling lugger sheltering from the gale in a little unfrequented bay along the coast. It might have been one of the crew, who had made himself acquainted with the circumstances he mentioned, and which was no secret, and made this bold dash for a prize: but this version of the story was scouted, as quite unworthy of the slightest credit. The former was the popular belief.

If any one of the *dramatis personae* of the above sketch should happen to cast his eye over it, which, by the way, is the most unlikely thing possible,

seeing the great probability that they have all been hanged long since; but if by *alibi*, or any other convenient means, only one should have escaped from justice, he will bear witness to the faithfulness of my narrative; and acknowledge, with gratitude, the obligation of immortality in the Monthly Magazine.

3: In The Marmalade

Barry Pain

1864-1928

The Windsor Magazine, Sep 1910

I TOOK the eleven o'clock Pullman for Brighton one Sunday morning, and entered the train twenty minutes before it started.

On the opposite side of the car to myself two men were seated. One of them was an elderly gentleman, with a neatly trimmed white beard, and from his face I judged him to be both wise and kind. I gathered that he was not going on in the train, and had merely entered it for a few minutes' chat with his companion. This latter was a much younger man, not more than twenty-five. He was a good-looking boy, and he seemed worried and even slightly excited. It was evident that he employed a first-rate tailor and bootmaker, and I think he gave fifteen shillings for his ordinary straw hat. His taste in clothes was quiet and correct, and I was a little surprised that he spoiled the set of a well-cut coat— he was wearing a dark blue lounge suit— by carrying a heavy pocket-book or something of that kind in the inner side-pocket.

"I've made up my mind," he said, a little irritably, "and it's no good to worry any more about it. I'm going to put it in her marmalade."

"Don't do it," said the older man anxiously. "I beg you not to do it. The consequences—"

"There won't be any consequences— at least, there won't be any of the kind you mean. I tell you, Parton did the same thing, and he swears there's no risk whatever. Discovery is practically impossible."

"I don't like it," said the old gentleman. "And I wish you had never told me about it, for it haunts me. You haven't even got the excuse of poverty."

"Perhaps not; but I'm not going to chuck money away, all the same."

"It might, I believe, lead to your arrest and—"

"Hush!" said the young man in a low voice. He had, I think, noticed that the conversation was being overheard by me.

They talked for a minute or two, and then the old gentleman shook bands and left the train. The only other phrase which I could catch was "probably in the *Lusitania*."

I have frequently been called a curious and interfering old man. It is certainly true that I take an interest in anything which interests me, and that I have the strongest dislike to being left with only part of a story. I meant, if I could, to get at the rest of the story in this case.

I changed my seat, after complaining of a draught to the attendant, and took the seat opposite the young man. There was a small table in between us, and we were now within conversational range. But I did not hurry matters; for

a time I read my paper sedulously, and appeared to take no notice of my young friend.

Presently he told the attendant to bring him a whisky and soda, and, in paying for his drink, he dropped a florin, which finally came to rest under my seat. I rescued it and handed it back to him. He thanked me politely, and said he was sorry to have given me the trouble.

"Oh, it was no trouble," I said. "Beautiful morning, isn't it?"

"Yes, pretty good."

"I wonder if it's impertinent for a stranger to say it— but I'm an old man, and old men notice such things— but I couldn't help being struck just now with the likeness between your father and yourself."

"Really? My father died about sixteen years ago."

"Ah, then it was not your father! My mistake. Stupid of me! I suppose one doesn't observe correctly when one is mentally preoccupied. And all the time I was puzzling over another point connected with you."

"Well?" said the young man grudgingly.

"Speaking frankly," I said, "and with my assurance on my word of honour that it shall go no further, what is it that you intend to put in her marmalade?"

His face showed how angry he was. "I think, sir," he said, "that you would do better to mind your own business!" He snatched up a newspaper from the table and opened it out between us.

"Funny you should tell me to mind my own business," I said placidly. "So many people have told me that And as a matter of fact, I have no business— no profession or occupation of any kind."

He made no answer whatever. Rather rude, I thought, seeing how very much younger he was than myself. I waited a few minutes, and then said—

"I don't want to hurry you, but you'll let me have my newspaper back when you've quite finished with it, won't you?" I had noticed that inadvertently he had picked up my newspaper.

He flung the newspaper down on the table, said a wicked word, finished his whisky and soda hurriedly, and went out. I think he found a seat in the next car; he did not return. I caught a glimpse of him at Brighton station as he drove away in a cab. And then I strolled up to the Metropole to lunch with friends of mine who were stopping there.

For the moment I did not see anything further to be done. I put the problem by for further consideration, with not much hope that I should ever be able to work it out.

Shortly after three that afternoon, it seemed to me wicked to keep my friends awake any longer— they had, I knew, the after-luncheon-snooze habit— and I left the hotel, and started on to the West Pier. And there, seated

in a deck-chair, with his back towards me, I found the young man who had been so unpardonably rude to me that morning. As I was looking at his back, he got up and strolled off. Something may be learned by the student of human backs. This young man had a dejected back. I followed him, but without any intention of overtaking him and tackling him again.

As I passed the chair where he had sat, I noticed on the seat of it a green leather case which might very well have caused that bulge in his pocket which I had noticed in the train. I sat down in that chair and opened the case.

The case contained a large diamond star. They were good white diamonds, and the thing would have cost a hundred pounds or very little less. Having satisfied myself as to its contents, I put it in my pocket, and, leaning back in the chair, closed my eyes in thought.

How could I piece the clues together? I went over them in my mind— diamonds, marmalade, a making or saving of money, a possibility of arrest, the *Lusitania*, And suddenly the whole explanation seemed to flash out at me. I take no credit for any peculiar cleverness about it, for I had heard of a similar fraud on the American Customs before.

All I had to do now was to wait in the neighbourhood of that deck-chair for my man to come back. I imagined— correctly, as the event showed— that he had taken the case from his pocket to look at the diamonds, and in replacing it had missed the pocket, and allowed the case to slip down between his coat and waistcoat. He would probably feel for those diamonds again in a few minutes, would find they were missing, and would return to see if he had dropped the case where he was sitting.

I now stood a few yards away from the deck-chair, with my back to it, looking out over the sea. I heard that the deck-chair was being moved, and steps going to and fro and round and round just behind me, but I did not turn my head until I heard the young man speaking to me. He was very polite this time.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I'm extremely sorry to trouble you, but while I was sitting here a few minutes ago I most carelessly allowed a green leather case to slip out of my pocket. The contents were valuable. I suppose you don't happen to have seen it?"

"You were extremely rude to me in the train this morning, sir. I am not disposed to help you in any way."

"Sorry if I seemed rude. I was a bit out of temper at the time. That old bore who came to see me off had been bothering me with a lot of good advice on my private affairs, and I didn't want to discuss them any further. If you have seen my case—"

"But how am I to know that it was your case? The person who took— But I'd better say nothing about it."

The young man had hurriedly pulled a paper from his pocket. "If you'll just look at that— it is the receipt from the shop where I bought the thing— it proves my ownership."

I glanced over the paper perfunctorily. "This tells me that, if you are the Reginald Wing, Esquire, here mentioned, you bought a diamond star. Nothing is said about the green leather case. And the person who took it did so very deliberately— no sign of nervousness, not the appearance of a thief at all."

"I am Mr. Wing," he said, and he was beautifully patient, "and the case is never mentioned in the bill. It contained the diamond star described there. I've already apologised for my abruptness this morning, and in a business like this every moment is of importance. If you'll give me a description of the man who picked up that case—"

"Pardon me, I never said it was a man. I said a person."

"What? Was it a woman? Young? Red hair? Rather—"

"You are asking me a great many questions. This morning you refused to answer one of mine."

"Well, tell me all you know about my diamonds, and I'll tell you everything about the marmalade."

That was the sentence I had been waiting for. "You are very good," I said, "but I already know about the marmalade."

"That," he said, "is absolutely impossible."

"It may appear so to you."

"If you'll first tell me who took my diamonds, and give me the time to see the police about recovering them, I'll hear your explanation and bet you a sovereign it is wrong. And if it is wrong, I will put you right. Will that suit you?"

"Perfectly. We might sit down, I think. It was I who took your diamonds."

"Great Scot, why didn't you say so?"

"Why didn't you ask me? Delicacy, perhaps. However, here they are, quite safe, as you will see, please."

He was fall of gratitude, and mighty glad to get that diamond star back again.

"And now, Mr. Wing," I said, "I'll proceed to win that sovereign from you. My name's Fish— Horace Fish— and as I have nothing else to do, I devote a good deal of time to solving the Chinese puzzles that the lives and private affairs of other people present to me. And with much practice I have gained a certain facility. That is why I have succeeded in doing what you thought impossible."

"I still think it impossible, Mr. Fish."

"We shall see. The clues in my possession, mostly derived from scraps of conversation overheard, were these— marmalade, in which something was to be put, diamonds, the *Lusitania*, an attempt to save money, and a possibility of serious consequences, perhaps arrest. Does not the order in which I have put these things already suggest to you that I have hit the right nail on the head?"

"No," said Mr. Wing.

"Well, you shall hear the whole story. You wish to send a diamond star to a lady at present resident in America. You wish to avoid the very high tariff on articles of this kind, and therefore you are going to use a dodge which a friend of yours, Parton by name, has already employed with success. You intend to conceal the star in a tin or jar of marmalade. You may send this in the ordinary way, but it seems to me more probable that you mean to entrust it to a friend who is crossing on the *Lusitania*. It is quite true that you will save money if your fraud is not detected. But I think the old gentleman who was with you in the train was quite right in warning you. Customs officers occasionally employ an investigatory skewer. If they used it on that marmalade, you would lose a great deal more money than the sum you propose to save."

"That," said Reginald Wing, "is about the most ingenious thing I ever heard. I could never have worked it out like that. I congratulate you, sir."

"And, if I remember correctly, you pay me a sovereign."

"Oh, no, Mr. Fish— not at all! You pay me the sovereign. Your story is most ingenious, and if ever I want to send precious stones to America, I may be able to make some practical use of it. But it's not right— in fact, it's all wrong from beginning to end. Now, the right story—"

"Yes," I said, feeling for my sovereign case, "what is it?"

"Quite simple. Miss Judd, who was housekeeper to my Uncle Ambrose during his lifetime, is, and always has been, one of the kindest and best-natured of women. As a boy of fourteen I owed much to her. Ever since, I have liked her and she has liked me. She is about fifteen years older than myself, and I have always regarded her as a kind of supernumerary aunt. Mark you, even in my boyhood's days she frequently bought sweets with the intention of presenting them to me, but was unable to resist the temptation to eat them herself."

"I don't quite see what this has to do with it."

"It has everything to do with it. When my Uncle Ambrose died— a little more than a year ago— no mention was made of me in his will. We had never quarrelled. He had told me definitely that I should get between seven and eight thousand when he was gone, and that my three cousins would get the same. Only a few days before his death he told Miss Judd that this was what he had done, and spoke of me with affection. The will was not very well drawn,

and I am convinced that the omission of my name was either a queer error of memory or a clerical oversight. That also was Miss Judd's view. He provided for my three cousins just as he had told me. To Miss Judd herself he left six hundred pounds a year for life, the money to go to his favourite hospital after her death. You have grasped these points, Mr. Fish? They are important."

"Yes, I understand."

"Very well. As soon as she knew the terms of the will, Miss Judd came to me in the greatest distress. Either I was to take half her income of six hundred pounds, or she would renounce the whole thing. She had no one dependent on her, and her tastes and habits would not require even three hundred pounds a year. She was convinced that my omission had been inadvertent, and that she would be carrying out the real wishes of my uncle. Under the pressure she brought to bear, I consented to receive three hundred pounds a year from her. Now, this income will cease when her life ceases. Also, as she puts by money every year, and will leave the whole of it to me, the longer she lives, the more I shall receive. Quite apart from ordinary humanity and the great affection I have for her, I have the most solid reasons for wishing Miss Judd to live as long as possible. But a most deplorable thing has happened. Good-natured people are generally lazy, and Miss Judd is no exception. Since my uncle's death she has refused to take up with any definite occupation. Her fatal passion for sweets has increased, and she has been mad enough to take a suite of rooms immediately over a high-class confectioner's shop. She never cared about exercise, and never walked a step further than she could help. The change has come with alarming rapidity. I saw her last week for the first time for six months, and she has become enormous. She breathes with difficulty; her heart is giving her trouble. She has consulted a doctor, who allows her to take no specific for obesity, but has put her on a strict diet. I believe she does make some attempt to adhere to that diet, but the attempt is, and will continue to be, a hopeless failure. With the confectioner's shop at hand, what else could you expect? She has faith in her doctor, and, except in the matter of diet, would not dream of disobeying his orders. Am I to let that woman die? Polden's Emaciatory Powders are colourless, harmless, almost tasteless. If I conceal them in the marmalade which she eats to excess every morning for breakfast, she will recover in spite of herself. You see?"

"I do. You risk a great deal."

"No risk at all. Parton and his two sisters have used them without ill effects of any kind— on the contrary, with great benefit to their health."

"That proves nothing. You have, it seems to me, an insurable interest in this lady's life. Why did you not insure it?"

"Do young men ever think of insurance? I did not until it was too late. No insurance company would accept Miss Judd now on any terms."

"And the diamonds— the mention of the *Lusitania?*"

"Had nothing whatever to do with it. I had intended to present these diamonds today to a young lady. For reasons which do not concern you, I have not given them to her."

"But, my dear Mr. Wing, everything concerns me."

"Very well, then. If you were lunching with a girl at a restaurant, and you found a dish so bad that you called up the manager and had it changed, and the girl in the manager's presence called you a silly idiot, and asked for a second helping of the same dish, would you think that she showed the kind of temper that promised happiness in the married life?"

"I should not."

"Nor did I. The reference to the *Lusitania* was quite accidental— a brother of mine is going out there on business. I think that's all."

I handed him the sovereign. "And," I said, "would you, as a favour, let me have two lines to say the result of your experiment with Miss Judd."

"Certainly. But I have not your address."

I gave him my card, and we parted. I thought that this would be a lesson to me in future not to decide too hurriedly that any particular thing amounted to a clue.

Next day I received the following letter:

Dear Sir,— In return for the service you rendered me, I promised to tell you the true explanation of the conversation which you overheard. I did not say when I would do it, but I choose to do it now. Observing in the train that you were making the utmost effort to overhear what my uncle and myself were saying, I thought I would give you something for your trouble. An almost imperceptible wink to my uncle accompanied my remark that I would put it in her marmalade, and my dear old uncle is fairly quick at the up-take. You followed up beautifully.

Briefly, you have been spoofed. Miss Judd and Uncle Ambrose and the Emaciatory Powder are but parts of a myth. My story about the diamonds and the girl was also spoof. So sorry, but you deserved it.

Faithfully yours,
Reginald Wing

People seem to think that if you deserve a thing, you must like to get it. This is not invariably the case. I tell the story because it shows that even the cleverest may occasionally fail.

———————

4: There is a Sorrow on the Sea

Gilbert Parker

(Sir Horatio Gilbert Parker 1862-1932)

The Idler April 1895

1

YORK FACTORY, Hudson's Bay,
23rd September, 1747.

MY DEAR Cousin Fanny,

It was a year last April Fool's Day, I left you on the sands there at Mablethorpe, no more than a stone's throw from the Book-in-Hand Inn, swearing that you should never see me or hear from me again. You remember how we saw the coast-guards flash their lights here and there, as they searched the sands for me? how one came bundling down the bank, calling, "Who goes there?" You remember that when I said, "A friend," he stumbled, and his light fell to the sands and went out, and in the darkness you and I stole away: you to your home, with a whispering, "God-bless-you, Cousin Dick," over your shoulder, and I with a bit of a laugh that, maybe, cut to the heart, and that split in a sob in my own throat— though you didn't hear that.

'Twas a bad night's work that, Cousin Fanny, and maybe I wish it undone, and maybe I don't; but a devil gets into the heart of a man when he has to fly from the lass he loves, while the friends of his youth go hunting him with muskets, and he has to steal out of the backdoor of his own country and shelter himself, like a cold sparrow, up in the eaves of the world.

Ay, lass, that's how I left the fens of Lincolnshire a year last April Fool's Day. There wasn't a dyke from, Lincoln town to Mablethorpe that I hadn't crossed with a running jump; and there wasn't a break in the shore, or a sink-hole in the sand, or a clump of rushes, or a samphire bed, from Skegness to Theddlethorpe, that I didn't know like every line of your face. And when I was a slip of a lad— ay, and later too— how you and I used to snuggle into little nooks of the sand-hills, maybe just beneath the coast-guard's hut, and watch the tide come swilling in-water-daisies you used to call the breaking surf, Cousin Fanny. And that was like you, always with a fancy about everything you saw. And when the ships, the fishing-smacks with their red sails, and the tall-masted brigs went by, taking the white foam on their canvas, you used to wish that you might sail away to the lands you'd heard tell of from old skippers that gathered round my uncle's fire in the Book-in-Hand. Ay, a grand thing I thought

it would be, too, to go riding round the world on a well-washed deck, with plenty of food and grog, and maybe, by-and-by, to be first mate, and lord it from fo'castle bunk to stern-rail.

You did not know, did you, who was the coast-guardsman that stumbled as he came on us that night? It looked a stupid thing to do that, and let the lantern fall. But, lass, 'twas done o' purpose. That was the one man in all the parish that would ha' risked his neck to let me free. 'Twas Lancy Doane, who's give me as many beatings in his time as I him. We were always getting foul one o' t'other since I was big enough to shy a bit of turf at him across a dyke, and there isn't a spot on's body that I haven't hit, nor one on mine that he hasn't mauled. I've sat on his head, and he's had his knee in my stomach till I squealed, and we never could meet without back-talking and rasping 'gainst the grain. The night before he joined the coast-guardsmen, he was down at the Book-in-Hand, and 'twas little like that I'd let the good chance pass— I might never have another; for Gover'ment folk will not easy work a quarrel on their own account. I mind him sittin' there on the settle, his shins against the fire, a long pipe going, and Casey of the *Lazy Beetle*, and Jobbin the mate of the *Dodger*, and Little Faddo, who had the fat Dutch wife down by the Ship Inn, and Whiggle the preaching blacksmith. And you were standin' with your back to the shinin' pewters, and the great jug of ale with the white napkin behind you; the light o' the fire wavin' on your face, and your look lost in the deep hollow o' the chimney. I think of you most as you were that minute, Cousin Fanny, when I come in. I tell you straight and fair, that was the prettiest picture I ever saw; and I've seen some rare fine things in my travels. 'Twas as if the thing had been set by some one, just to show you off to your best. Here you were, a slip of a lass, straight as a bulrush, and your head hangin' proud on your shoulders; yet modest too, as you can see off here in the North the top of the golden-rod flower swing on its stem. You were slim as slim, and yet there wasn't a corner on you; so soft and full and firm you were, like the breast of a quail; and I mind me how the shine of your cheeks was like the glimmer of an apple after you've rubbed it with a bit of cloth. Well, there you stood in some sort of smooth, plain, clingin' gown, a little bit loose and tumblin' at the throat, and your pretty foot with a brown slipper pushed out, just savin' you from bein' prim. That's why the men liked you— you didn't carry a sermon in your waist-ribbon, and the Lord's Day in the lift o' your chin; but you had a smile to give when 'twas the right time for it, and men never said things with you there that they'd have said before many another maid.

'Twas a thing I've thought on off here, where I've little to do but think, how a lass like you could put a finger on the lip of such rough tykes as Faddo, Jobbin, and the rest, keepin' their rude words under flap and button. Do you

mind how, when I passed you comin' in, I laid my hand on yours as it rested on the dresser? That hand of yours wasn't a tiny bit of a thing, and the fingers weren't all taperin' like a simperin' miss from town, worked down in the mill of quality and got from graftin' and graftin', like one of them roses from the flower-house at Mablethorpe Hall— not fit to stand by one o' them that grew strong and sweet with no fancy colour, in the garden o' the Book-in-Hand. Yours was a hand that talked as much as your lips or face, as honest and white; and the palm all pink, and strong as strong could be, and warmin' every thread in a man's body when he touched it. Well, I touched your hand then, and you looked at me and nodded, and went musin' into the fire again, not seemin' to hear our gabble.

But, you remember— don't you?— how Jobbin took to chaffin' of Lancy Doane, and how Faddo's tongue got sharper as the time got on, and many a nasty word was said of coast-guards and excisemen, and all that had to do with law and gover'ment. Cuts there were at some of Laney's wild doings in the past, and now and then they'd turn to me, saying what they thought would set me girdin' Lancy too. But I had my own quarrel, and I wasn't to be baited by such numskulls. And Lancy— that was a thing I couldn't understand— he did no more than shrug his shoulder and call for more ale, and wish them all good health and a hundred a year. I never thought he could ha' been so patient-like. But there was a kind of little smile, too, on his face, showin' he did some thinkin'; and I guessed he was bidin' his time.

I wasn't as sharp as I might ha' been, or I'd ha' seen what he was waitin' for, with that quiet provokin' smile on his face, and his eyes smoulderin' like. I don't know to this day whether you wanted to leave the room when you did, though 'twas about half after ten o'clock, later than I ever saw you there before. But when my uncle come in from Louth, and give you a touch on the shoulder, and said: 'To bed wi' you, my lass,' you waited for a minute longer, glancin' round on all of us, at last lookin' steady at Lancy; and he got up from his chair, and took off his hat to you with a way he had. You didn't stay a second after that, but went away straight, sayin' good-night to all of us, but Lancy was the only one on his feet.

Just as soon as the door was shut behind you, Lancy turned round to the fire, and pushed the log with his feet in a way a man does when he's thinkin' a bit. And Faddo give a nasty laugh, and said:

"Theer's a dainty sitovation. Theer's Mr. Thomas Doane, outlaw and smuggler, and theer's Mr. Lancy Doane his brother, coast-guardsman. Now, if them two should 'appen to meet on Lincolnshire coast, Lord, theer's a sitovation for ye— Lord, theer's a cud to chew! 'Ere's one gentleman wants to try 'is 'and at 'elpin' Prince Charlie, and when 'is Up doesn't amount to

anythink, what does the King on 'is throne say? He says, 'As for Thomas Doane, Esquire, aw've doone wi' 'im.' And theer's another gentleman, Mr. Lancy Doane, Esquire. He turns pious, and says, 'Aw'm goin' for a coast-guardsman.' What does the King on his throne say? 'E says, 'Theer's the man for me.'

But aw says, "Aw've doone, aw've doone wi' Mr. Lancy Doane, Esquire, and be damned to 'im! He! he! Theer's a fancy sitovation for ye. Mr. Thomas Doane, Esquire, smuggler and outlaw, an' Mr. Lancy Doane, Esquire, coast-guardsman. Aw've doone. Ho! ho! That gits into my crop."

I tell you these things, Cousin Fanny, because I'm doubtin' if you ever heard them, or knew exactly how things stood that night. I never was a friend of Lancy Doane, you understand, but it's only fair that the truth be told about that quarrel, for like as not he wouldn't speak himself, and your father was moving in and out; and, I take my oath, I wouldn't believe Faddo and the others if they was to swear on the Bible. Not that they didn't know the truth when they saw it, but they did love just to let their fancy run. I'm livin' over all the things that happened that night— livin' them over to-day, when everything's so quiet about me here, so lonesome. I wanted to go over it all, bit by bit, and work it out in my head, just as you and I used to do the puzzle games we played in the sands. And maybe, when you're a long way off from things you once lived, you can see them and understand them better. Out here, where it's so lonely, and yet so good a place to live in, I seem to get the hang o' the world better, and why some things are, and other things aren't; and I thought it would pull at my heart to sit down and write you a long letter, goin' over the whole business again; but it doesn't. I suppose I feel as a judge does when he goes over a lot of evidence, and sums it all up for the jury. I don't seem prejudiced one way or another. But I'm not sure that I've got all the evidence to make me ken everything; and that's what made me bitter wild the last time that I saw you. Maybe you hadn't anything to tell me, and maybe you had, and maybe, if you ever write to me out here, you'll tell me if there's anything I don't know about them days.

Well, I'll go back now to what happened when Faddo was speakin' at my uncle's bar. Lancy Doane was standin' behind the settle, leanin' his arms on it, and smokin' his pipe quiet. He waited patient till Faddo had done, then he comes round the settle, puts his pipe up in the rack between the rafters, and steps in front of Faddo. If ever the devil was in a man's face, it looked out of Lancy Doane's that minute. Faddo had touched him on the raw when he fetched out that about Tom Doane. All of a sudden Lancy swings, and looks at the clock.

"It's half-past ten, Jim Faddo," said he, "and aw've got an hour an' a half to deal wi' you as a Lincolnshire lad. At twelve o'clock aw'm the Gover'ment's, but

till then aw'm Lancy Doane, free to strike or free to let alone; to swallow dirt or throw it; to take a lie or give it. And now list to me; aw'm not goin' to eat dirt, and aw'm goin' to give you the lie, and aw'm goin' to break your neck, if I swing for it to-morrow, Jim Faddo. And here's another thing aw'll tell you. When the clock strikes twelve, on the best horse in the country aw'll ride to Theddlethorpe, straight for the well that's dug you know where, to find your smuggled stuff, and to run the irons round your wrists. Aw'm dealin' fair wi' you that never dealt fair by no man. You never had an open hand nor soft heart; and because you've made money, not out o' smugglin' alone, but out o' poor devils of smugglers that didn't know rightly to be rogues, you think to fling your dirt where you choose. But aw'll have ye to-night as a man, and aw'll have ye to-night as a King's officer, or aw'll go damned to hell."

Then he steps back a bit very shiny in the face, and his eyes like torchlights, but cool and steady. "Come on now," he says, "Jim Faddo, away from the Book-in-Hand, and down to the beach under the sand-hills, and we'll see man for man— though, come to think of it, y 'are no man," he said— "if ye'll have the right to say when aw'm a King's officer that you could fling foul words in the face of Lancy Doane. And a word more,' he says; 'aw wouldn't trust ye if an Angel o' Heaven swore for ye. Take the knife from the belt behind your back there, and throw it on the table, for you wouldn't bide by no fair rules o' fightin'. Throw the knife on the table," he says, comin' a step forward.

Faddo got on to his feet. He was bigger built than Lancy, and a bit taller, and we all knew he was devilish strong in his arms. There was a look in his face I couldn't understand. One minute I thought it was fear, and another I thought it was daze; and maybe it was both. But all on a sudden something horrible cunnin' come into it, and ugly too.

"Go to the well, then, since ye've found out all about it,' he says, "but aw've an hour and a half start o' ye, Lancy Doane."

"Ye've less than that," says Lancy back to him, "if ye go with me to the sands first."

At that my uncle stepped in to say a word for peacemakin', but Lancy would have none of it. "Take the knife and throw it on the table," he said to Faddo once more, and Faddo took it out and threw it down.

"'Come on, then," Faddo says, with a sneerin' laugh; "we'll see by daybreak who has the best o' this night's work," and he steps towards the door.

"Wait a minute," says Lancy, gettin' in front of him. "Now take the knife from your boot. Take it," he says again, "or aw will. That's like a man, to go to a fist fight wi' knives. Take it," he said. "Aw'll gi' ye till aw count four, and if ye doan't take it, aw'll take it meself. One!" he says steady and soft. "Two!" Faddo never moved. "Three!" The silence made me sick, and the clock ticked like

hammers. "Four!" he said, and then he sprang for the boot, but Faddo's hand went down like lightnin' too. I couldn't tell exactly how they clinched but once or twice I saw the light flash on the steel. Then they came down together, Faddo under, and when I looked again Faddo was lying eyes starin' wide, and mouth all white with fear, for Lancy was holding the knife-point at his throat. "Stir an inch," says Lancy, "and aw'll pin ye to the lid o' hell."

Three minutes by the clock he knelt there on Faddo's chest, the knife-point touching the bone in's throat. Not one of us stirred, but just stood lookin', and my own heart beat so hard it hurt me, and my uncle steadyin' himself against the dresser. At last Lancy threw the knife away into the fire.

"Coward!" he said. "A man would ha' taken the knife. Did you think aw was goin' to gie my neck to the noose just to put your knife to proper use? But don't stir till aw gie you the word, or aw'll choke the breath o' life out o' ye."

At that Faddo sprung to clinch Lancy's arms, but Lancy's fingers caught him in the throat, and I thought surely Faddo was gone, for his tongue stood out a finger-length, and he was black in the face.

"For God's sake, Lancy," said my uncle, steppin' forward, "let him go.'

At that Lancy said: 'He's right enough. It's not the first time aw've choked a coward. Throw cold water on him and gi' 'im brandy."

Sure enough, he wasn't dead. Lancy stood there watchin' us while we fetched Faddo back, and I tell you, that was a narrow squeak for him. When he got his senses again, and was sittin' there lookin' as if he'd been hung and brought back to life, Lancy says to him: "There, Jim Faddo, aw've done wi' you as a man, and at twelve o'clock aw'll begin wi' you as King's officer." And at that, with a good-night to my uncle and all of us, he turns on his heels and leaves the Book-in-Hand.

I tell you, Cousin Fanny, though I'd been ripe for quarrel wi' Lancy Doane myself that night, I could ha' took his hand like a brother, for I never saw a man deal fairer wi' a scoundrel than he did wi' Jim Faddo. You see, it wasn't what Faddo said about himself that made Laney wild, but that about his brother Tom; and a man doesn't like his brother spoken ill of by dirt like Faddo, be it true or false. And of Laney's brother I'm goin' to write further on in this letter, for I doubt that you know all I know about him, and the rest of what happened that night and afterwards.

DEAR Cousin Fanny,

I canna write all I set out to, for word come to me, just as I wrote the last sentence above, that the ship was to leave port three days sooner than was fixed for when I began. I have been rare and busy since then, and I have no time to write more. And so 'twill be another year before you get a word from

me; but I hope that when this letter comes you'll write one back to me by the ship that sails next summer from London. The summer's short and the winter's long here, Cousin Fanny, and there's more snow than grass; and there's more flowers in a week in Mablethorpe than in a whole year here. But, lass, the sun shines always, and my heart keeps warm in thinkin' of you, and I ask you to forgive me for any harsh word I ever spoke, not forgettin' that last night when I left you on the sands, and stole away like a thief across the sea. I'm going to tell you the whole truth in my next letter, but I'd like you to forgive me before you know it all, for 'tis a right lonely and distant land, this, and who can tell what may come to pass in twice a twelve month! Maybe a prayer on lips like mine doesn't seem in place, for I've not lived as parson says man ought to live, but I think the Lord will have no worse thought o' me when I say, God bless thee, lass, and keep thee safe as any flower in His garden that He watereth with His own hand. Write to me, lass: I love thee still, I do love thee.

Dick Orry.

2

THE Book-In-Hand Inn,
Mablethorpe, Lincolnshire.
May-Day, 1749.

DEAR Cousin Dick

I think I have not been so glad in many years as when I got your letter last Guy Fawkes Day. I was coming from the church where the parson preached on plots and treasons, and obedience to the King, when I saw the old postman coming down the road. I made quickly to him, I know not why, for I had not thought to hear from you, and before I reached him he held up his hand, showing me the stout packet which brought me news of you. I hurried with it to the inn, and went straight to my room and sat down by the window, where I used to watch for your coming with the fishing fleet, down the sea from the Dogger Bank. I was only a girl, a young girl, then, and the Dogger Bank was, to my mind, as far off as that place you call York Factory, in Hudson's Bay, is to me now. And yet I did not know how very far it was until our schoolmaster showed me on a globe how few days' sail it is to the Dogger Bank, and how many to York Factory.

But I will tell you of my reading of your letter, and of what I thought. But first I must go back a little. When you went away that wild, dark night, with bitter words on your lips to me, Cousin Dick, I thought I should never feel the same again. You did not know it, but I was bearing the misery of your trouble

and of another's also, and of my own as well; and so I said over and over again, Oh, why will men be hard on women? Why do they look for them to be iron like themselves, bearing double burdens as most women do? But afterwards I settled to a quietness which I would not have you think was happiness, for I have given up thought of that. Nor would I have you think me bearing trouble sweetly, for sometimes I was most hard and stubborn. But I lived on in a sort of stillness till that morning when, sitting by my window, I read all you had written to me. And first of all I must tell you how my heart was touched at your words about our childhood together. I had not thought it lay so deep in your mind, Cousin Dick. It always stays in mine; but then, women have more memories than men. The story of that night I knew; but never fully as you have told it to me in your letter. Of what happened after Lancy Doane left the inn, of which you have not written, but promised the writing in your next letter, I think I know as well as yourself. Nay, more, Cousin Dick. There are some matters concerning what followed that night and after, which I know, and you do not know. But you have guessed there was something which I did not tell you, and so there was. And I will tell you of them now. But I will take up the thread of the story where you dropped it, and reel it out.

You left the inn soon after Lancy Doane, and James Faddo went then too, riding hard for Theddlethorpe, for he knew that in less than an hour the coast-guards would be rifling the hiding places of his smuggled stuff. You did not take a horse, but, getting a musket, you walked the sands hard to Theddlethorpe.

I know it all, though you did not tell me, Cousin Dick. You had no purpose in going, save to see the end of a wretched quarrel and a smuggler's ill scheme. You carried a musket for your own safety, not with any purpose. It was a day of weight in your own life, for on one side you had an offer from the Earl Fitzwilliam to serve on his estate; and on the other to take a share in a little fleet of fishing smacks, of which my father was part owner. I think you know to which side I inclined, but that now is neither here nor there; and, though you did not tell me, as you went along the shore you were more intent on handing backwards and forwards in your mind your own affairs, than of what should happen at Theddlethorpe. And so you did not hurry as you went, and, as things happened, you came to Faddo's house almost at the same moment with Lancy Doane and two other mounted coast-guards.

You stood in the shadow while they knocked at Faddo's door. You were so near, you could see the hateful look in his face. You were surprised he did not try to stand the coast-guards off. You saw him, at their bidding, take a lantern, and march with them to a shed standing off a little from the house, nearer to the shore. Going a roundabout swiftly, you came to the shed first, and posted yourself at the little window on the sea-side. You saw them enter with the

lantern, saw them shift a cider press, uncover the floor, and there beneath, in a dry well, were barrels upon barrels of spirits, and crouched among them was a man whom you all knew at once— Lancy's brother, Tom. That, Cousin Dick, was Jim Faddo's revenge. Tom Doane had got refuge with him till he should reach his brother, not knowing Lancy was to be coast-guard. Faddo, coming back from Mablethorpe, told Tom the coast-guards were to raid him that night; and he made him hide in this safe place, as he called it, knowing that Lancy would make for it.

For a minute after Tom was found no man stirred. Tom was quick of brain and wit— would it had always been put, to good purposes!— and saw at once Faddo's treachery. Like winking he fired at the traitor, who was almost as quick to return the fire. What made you do it I know not, unless it was you hated treachery; but, sliding in at the open door behind the coast-guards, you snatched the lantern from the hands of one, threw it out of the open door, and, thrusting them aside, called for Tom to follow you. He sprang towards you over Faddo's body, even as you threw the lantern, and, catching his arm, you ran with him towards the dyke.

"Ready for a great jump!" you said. "Your life hangs on it." He was even longer of leg than you. "Is it a dyke?" he whispered, as the shots from three muskets rang after you. "A dyke. When I count three, jump," you answered. I have read somewhere of the great leap that one Don Alvarado, a Spaniard, made in Mexico, but surely never was a greater leap than you two made that night, landing safely on the other side, and making for the sea-shore. None of the coast guardsmen, not even Lancy, could make the leap, for he was sick and trembling, though he had fired upon his own brother. And so they made for the bridge some distance above, just as the faint moon slipped behind a cloud and hid you from their sight.

That is no country to hide in, as you know well, no caves, or hills, or mazy coombes, just a wide, flat, reedy place, broken by open woods. The only refuge for both now was the sea. 'Twas a wild run you two made, side by side, down that shore, keeping close within the gloom of the sand-hills, the coast-guards coming after, pressing you closer than they thought at the time, for Tom Doane had been wounded in the leg. But Lancy sent one back for the horses, he and the other coming on; and so, there you were, two and two. 'Twas a cruel task for Lancy that night, enough to turn a man's hair grey. But duty was duty, though those two lads were more to each other than most men ever are. You know how it ended. But I want to go all over it just to show you that I understand. You were within a mile of Mablethorpe, when you saw a little fishing smack come riding in, and you made straight for it. Who should be in the smack but Solby, the canting Baptist, who was no friend to you or my

uncle, or any of us. You had no time for bargaining or coaxing, and so, at the musket's mouth, you drove him from the boat, and pushed it out just as Lancy and his men came riding up. Your sail was up, and you turned the lugger to the wind in as little time as could be, but the coast-guardsmen rode after you, calling you to give in. No man will ever know the bitter trouble in Lancy's heart when he gave the order to fire on you, though he did not fire himself. And you— do I not know, Cousin Dick, what you did? Tom Doane was not the man to fire at the three dark figures riding you down, not knowing which was his brother. But you, you understood that; and you were in, you said to yourself, and you'd play the game out, come what would. You raised your musket and drew upon a figure. At that moment a coast-guard's musket blazed, and you saw the man you had drawn on was Lancy Doane. You lowered your musket, and as you did a ball struck you on the wrist.

Oh, I have thanked God a hundred times, dear Cousin Dick, that you fired no shot that night, but only helped a hunted, miserable man away, for you did get free. Just in the nick of time your sail caught the wind, and you steered for the open sea. Three days from that, Tom Doane was safe in the Low Country, and you were on your way back to Lincolnshire. You came by a fishing boat to Saltfleet Haven, and made your way down the coast towards Mablethorpe. Passing Theddlethorpe, you went up to Faddo's house, and, looking through the window, you saw Faddo, not dead, but being cared for by his wife. Then you came on to Mablethorpe, and standing under my window, at the very moment when I was on my knees praying for the safety of those who travelled by sea, you whistled like a quail from the garden below— the old signal. Oh, how my heart stood still a moment and then leaped, for I knew it was you! I went down to the garden, and there you were. Oh, but I was glad to see you, Cousin Dick!

You remember how I let you take me in your arms for an instant, and then I asked if he was safe. And when you told me that he was, I burst into tears, and I asked you many questions about him. And you answered them quickly, and then would have taken me in your arms again. But I would not let you, for then I knew— I knew that you loved me, and, oh, a dreadful feeling came into my heart, and I drew back, and could have sunk upon the ground in misery, but that there came a thought of your safety! He was safe, but you— you were here, where reward was posted for you. I begged you to come into the house, that I might hide you there, but you would not. You had come for one thing, you said, and only one. An hour or two, and then you must be gone for London. And so you urged me to the beach. I was afraid we might be seen, but you led me away from the cottages near to the little bridge which crosses the dyke. By that way we came to the sands, as we thought unnoted. But no, who

should it be to see us but that canting Baptist, Solby! And so the alarm was given. You had come, dear Cousin Dick, to ask me one thing— if I loved you? and if, should you ever be free to come back, I would be your wife? I did not answer you; I could not answer you; and, when you pressed me, I begged you to have pity on me and not to speak of it. You thought I was not brave enough to love a man open to the law. As if— as if I knew not that what you did came out of a generous, reckless heart. And on my knees— oh, on my knees— I ought to have thanked you for it! But I knew not what to say; my lips were closed. And just then shots were fired, and we saw the coast-guards' lights. Then came Lancy Doane stumbling down the banks, and our parting— our parting. Your bitter laugh as you left me has rung in my ears ever since.

Do not think we have been idle here in your cause, for I myself went to Earl Fitzwilliam and told him the whole story, and how you had come to help Tom Doane that night. How do I know of it all? Because I have seen a letter from Tom Doane. Well, the Earl promised to lay your case before the King himself, and to speak for you with good eager entreaty. And so, it may be, by next time I write, there will go good news to you, and— will you then come back, dear Cousin Dick?

And now I want to tell you what I know, and what you do not know. Tom Doane had a wife in Mablethorpe. He married her when she was but sixteen— a child. But she was afraid of her father's anger, and her husband soon after went abroad, became one of Prince Charlie's men, and she's never seen him since. She never really loved him, but she never forgot that she was his wife; and she always dreaded his coming back; as well she might, for you see what happened when he did come. I pitied her, dear Cousin Dick, with all my heart; and when Tom Doane died on the field of battle in Holland last year, I wept with her and prayed for her. And you would have wept too, man though you are, if you had seen how grateful she was that he died in honourable fighting and not in a smuggler's cave at Theddlethorpe. She blessed you for that, and she never ceases to work with me for the King's pardon for you.

There is no more to say now, dear Cousin Dick, save that I would have you know I think of you with great desire of heart for your well-being, and I pray God for your safe return some day to the good country which, pardoning you, will cast you out no more.

I am, dear Cousin Dick,

Thy most affectionate Cousin,

Fanny.

Afterword— Dear Dick, my heart bursts for joy. Enclosed here is thy pardon, sent by the good Earl Fitzwilliam last night. I could serve him on my

knees for ever. Dick, she that was Tom Doane's wife, she loves thee. Wilt thou not come back to her?

In truth, she always loved thee. She was thy cousin; she is thy Fanny. Now thou knowest all.

5: The Lost Club

Arthur Machen

1863–1947

The Whirlpool, 6 Dec 1890

ONE HOT AFTERNOON in August a gorgeous young gentleman, one would say the last of his race in London, set out from the Circus end, and proceeded to stroll along the lonely expanse of Piccadilly Deserta. True to the traditions of his race, faithful even in the wilderness, he had not bated one jot or tittle of the regulation equipage; a glorious red and yellow blossom in his woolly and exquisitely-cut frock coat proclaimed him a true son of the carnation; hat and boots and chin were all polished to the highest pitch; though there had not been rain for many weeks his trouser-ends were duly turned up, and the poise of the gold-headed cane was in itself a liberal education. But ah! the heavy changes since June, when the leaves glanced green in the sunlit air, and the club windows were filled, and the hansoms flashed in long processions through the streets, and girls smiled from every carriage.

The young man sighed; he thought of the quiet little evenings at the Phoenix, of encounters of the Row, of the drive to Hurlingham, and many pleasant dinners in joyous company. Then he glanced up and saw a bus, half-empty, slowly lumbering along the middle of the street, and in front of the "White Horse Cellars" a four-wheeler had stopped still (the driver was asleep on his seat), and in the "Badminton" the blinds were down. He half expected to see the Briar Rose trailing gracefully over the Hotel Cosmopole; certainly the Beauty, if such a thing were left in Piccadilly, was fast asleep.

Absorbed in these mournful reflections the hapless Johnny strolled on without observing that an exact duplicate of himself was advancing on the same pavement from the opposite direction; save that the inevitable carnation was salmon colour, and the cane a silver-headed one, instruments of great magnifying power would have been required to discriminate between them. The two met; each raised his eyes simultaneously at the strange sight of a well-dressed man, and each adjured the same old-world deity.

"By Jove! old man, what the deuce are you doing here?"

The gentleman who had advanced from the direction of Hyde Park Corner was the first to answer.

"Well, to tell the truth, Austin, I am detained in town on— ah— legal business. But how is it you are not in Scotland?"

"Well, it's curious; but the fact is, I have legal business in town also."

"You don't say so? Great nuisance, ain't it? But these things must be seen to, or a fellow finds himself in no end of a mess, don't you know?"

"He does, by Jove! That's what I thought."

Mr. Austin relapsed into silence for a few moments.

"And where are you off to, Phillipps?"

The conversation had passed with the utmost gravity on both sides. At the joint mention of legal business, it was true, a slight twinkle had passed across their eyes, but the ordinary observer would have said that the weight of ages rested on those unruffled brows.

"I really couldn't say. I thought of having a quiet dinner at Azario's. The Badminton is closed, you know, for repairs or somethin', and I can't stand the Junior Wilton. Come along with me, and let's dine together."

"By Jove! I think I will. I thought of calling on my solicitor, but I dare say he can wait."

"Ah! I should think he could. We'll have some of that Italian wine— stuff in salad oil flasks— you know what I mean."

The pair solemnly wheeled round, and solemnly paced towards the Circus, meditating, doubtless, on many things. The dinner in the little restaurant pleased them with a grave pleasure, as did the Chianti, of which they drank a good deal too much; "quite a light wine, you know," said Phillipps, and Austin agreed with him, so they emptied a quart flask between them, and finished up with a couple of glasses apiece of Green Chartreuse. As they came out into the quiet street smoking vast cigars, the two slaves to duty and "legal business" felt a dreamy delight in all things, the street seemed full of fantasy in the dim light of the lamps, and a single star shining in the clear sky above seemed to Austin exactly of the same colour as Green Chartreuse. Phillipps agreed with him. "You know, old fellow," he said, "there are times when a fellow feels all sorts of strange things— you know, the sort of things they put in magazines, don't you know, and novels. By Jove, Austin, old man, I feel as if I could write a novel myself."

They wandered aimlessly on, not quite knowing where they were going, turning from one street to another, and discoursing in a maudlin strain. A great cloud had been slowly moving up from the South, darkening the sky, and suddenly it began to rain, at first slowly with great heavy drops, and then faster and faster in a pitiless, hissing shower; the gutters flooded over, and the furious drops danced up from the stones. The two walked on as fast as they could, whistling and calling "Hansom!" in vain; they were really getting very wet.

"Where the dickens are we?" said Phillipps. "Confound it all I don't know. We ought to be in Oxford Street."

They walked on a little farther, when suddenly, to their great joy, they found a dry archway, leading into a dark passage or courtyard. They took

shelter silently, too thankful and too wet to say anything. Austin looked at his hat; it was a wreck; and Phillipps shook himself feebly, like a tired terrier.

"What a beastly nuisance this is," he muttered: "I only wish I could see a hansom."

Austin looked into the street; the rain was still falling in torrents; he looked up the passage, and noticed for the first time that it led to a great house, which towered grimly against the sky. It seemed all dark and gloomy, except that from some chink in a shutter a light shone out. He pointed it out to Phillipps, who stared vacantly about him, then exclaimed:

"Hang it! I know where we are now. At least, I don't exactly know, you know, but I once came by here with Wylliams, and he told me there was some club or somethin' down this passage; I don't recollect exactly what he said. Hullo! why there goes Wylliams. I say, Wylliams, tell us where we are!"

A gentleman had brushed past them in the darkness and was walking fast down the passage. He heard his name and turned round, looking rather annoyed.

"Well, Phillipps, what do you want? Good evening, Austin; you seem rather wet, both of you."

"I should think we were wet; got caught in the rain. Didn't you tell me once there was some club down here? I wish you'd take us in, if you're a member."

Mr. Wylliams looked steadfastly at the two forlorn young men for a moment, hesitated, and said:

"Well, gentlemen, you may come with me if you like. But I must impose a condition; that you both give me your word of honour never to mention the club, or anything that you see while you are in it, to any individual whatsoever."

"Certainly not," replied Austin; "of course we shouldn't dream of doing so, should we, Phillipps?"

"No, no; go ahead, Wylliams, we'll keep it dark enough."

The party moved slowly down the passage till they came to the house. It was very large and very old; it looked as though it might have been an embassy of the last century. Wylliams whistled, knocked twice at the door, and whistled again, and it was opened by a man in black.

"Friends of yours, Mr. Wylliams?"

Wylliams nodded and they passed on.

"Now mind," he whispered, as they paused at a door, "you are not to recognize anybody, and nobody will recognize you."

The two friends nodded, and the door was opened, and they entered a vast room, brilliantly-lighted with electric lamps. Men were standing in knots, walking up and down, and smoking at little tables; it was just like any club

smoking-room. Conversation was going on, but in a low murmur, and every now and then someone would stop talking, and look anxiously at a door at the other end of the room, and then turn round again. It was evident that they were waiting for someone or somebody. Austin and Phillipps were sitting on a sofa, lost in amazement; nearly every face was familiar to them. The flower of the Row was in that strange club-room; several young noblemen, a young fellow who had just come into an enormous fortune, three or four fashionable artists and literary men, an eminent actor, and a well-known canon. What could it mean? They were all supposed to be scattered far and wide over the habitable globe, and yet here they were. Suddenly there came a loud knock at the door; and every man started, and those who were sitting got up. A servant appeared.

"The President is awaiting you, gentlemen," he said, and vanished.

One by one the members filed out, and Wylliams and the two guests brought up the rear. They found themselves in a room still larger than the first, but almost quite dark. The president sat at a long table and before him burned two candles, which barely lighted up his face. It was the famous Duke of Dartington, the largest landowner in England. As soon as the members had entered he said in a cold hard voice: "Gentlemen, you know our rules; the book is prepared. Whoever opens it at the black page is at the disposal of the committee and myself. We had better begin." Someone began to read out the names in a low distinct voice, pausing after each name, and the member called came up to the table and opened at random the pages of a big folio volume that lay between the two candles. The gloomy light made it difficult to distinguish features, but Phillipps heard a groan beside him, and recognized an old friend. His face was working fearfully, the man was evidently in an agony of terror.

One by one the members opened the book; as each man did so he passed out by another door. At last there was only one left; it was Phillipps's friend. There was foam upon his lips as he passed up to the table, and his hand shook as he opened the leaves. Wylliams had passed out after whispering to the president, and had returned to his friends' side. He could hardly hold them back as the unfortunate man groaned in agony and leant against the table: he had opened the book at the black page. "Kindly come with me, Mr. D'Aubigny," said the president, and they passed out together.

"We can go now," said Wylliams, "I think the rain has gone off. Remember your promise, gentlemen. You have been at a meeting of the Lost Club. You will never see that young man again. Good night."

"It isn't murder, is it?" gasped Austin.

"Oh no, not at all. Mr. D'Aubigny will, I hope, live for many years; he has disappeared. Good night; there's a hansom that will do for you."

The two friends went to their homes in dead silence. They did not meet again for three weeks, and each thought the other looked ill and shaken. They walked drearily, with grave averted faces down Piccadilly, each afraid to begin the recollection of the terrible club. Of a sudden Phillipps stopped as if he had been shot. "Look there, Austin," he muttered, "look at that." The posters of the evening papers were spread out beside the pavement, and on one of them Austin saw in large blue letters, "Mysterious disappearance of a Gentleman." Austin bought a copy and turned over the leaves with shaking fingers till he found the brief paragraph—

St. John D'Aubigny, of Stoke D'Aubigny, in Sussex has disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Mr. D'Aubigny was staying at Strathdoon, in Scotland, and came up to London, as it is stated, on business, on August 16th. It has been ascertained that he arrived safely at King's Cross, and drove to Piccadilly Circus, where he got out. It is said that he was last seen at the corner of Glass House Street, leading from Regent Street into Soho. Since the above date the unfortunate gentleman, who was much liked in London society, has not been heard of. Mr. D'Aubigny was to have been married in September. The police are extremely reticent.

"Good God! Austin, this is dreadful. You remember the date. Poor fellow, poor fellow!"

"Phillipps, I think I shall go home."

D'Aubigny was never heard of again. But the strangest part of the story remains to be told. The two friends called Wylliams, and charged him with being a member of the Lost Club, and an accomplice in the fate of D'Aubigny. The placid Mr. Wylliams at first stared at the two pale, earnest faces, and finally roared with laughter.

"My dear fellows, what on earth are you talking about? I never heard such a cock-and-bull story in my life. As you say, Phillipps, I once pointed out to you a house said to be a club, as we were walking through Soho; but that was a low gambling club, frequented by German Waiters. I am afraid the fact is that Mario's Chianti was rather too strong for you. However, I will try to convince you of your mistake."

Wylliams forthwith summoned his man, who swore that he and his master were in Cairo during the whole of August, and offered to produce the hotel bills. Phillipps shook his head, and they went away. Their next step was to try and find the archway where they had taken shelter, and after a good deal of trouble they succeeded. They knocked at the door of the gloomy house, whistling as Wylliams had done. They were admitted by a respectable

mechanic in a white apron, who was evidently astonished at the whistle; in fact he was inclined to suspect the influence of a "drop too much." The place was a billiard table factory, and had been so (as far as they learnt in the neighbourhood) for many years. The rooms must once have been large and magnificent, but most of them had been divided into three or four separate workshops by wooden partitions.

Phillipps sighed; he could do no more for his lost friend; but both he and Austin remained unconvinced. In justice to Mr. Wylliams, it must be stated that Lord Henry Harcourt assured Phillipps that he had seen Wylliams in Cairo about the middle of August; he thought, but could not be sure, on the 16th; and also, that the recent disappearances of some well-known men about town are patent of explanations which would exclude the agency of the Lost Club.

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6: The Man who Died Twice

Andrew Soutar

1879-1941

Mystery, April 1933

British writer, who had many movies made from his novels and stories during the silent era.

THE man from Queensland felt proud of himself as he stood before the mirror in his hotel and stroked the point of his trim beard. He had returned from a dinner given in his honor by members of the Chamber of Commerce; the plaudits of the company were still ringing in his ears. The chairman had said:

"Our guest, as you may have read in the newspapers, has come from Australia with a romance that should infuse new courage into the flagging hearts of every farmer in this country.

"From a small boy, penniless and often hungry, he has risen to become one of the richest sheep farmers in that far distant continent. Gentlemen, I ask you to rise and drink to the health of Mr. Arnold Chester."

As he stared at his reflection in the mirror Chester thought: "I wonder what they would have said if I had told them the truth? They were paying homage to my money, not my 'romance'!"

He had never been penniless or hungry in his life. He had been resentful of restraint, of custom, of influence being necessary to get on in life. He was resentful of the slow methods of the merchants who employed him. When Australia called he hadn't the money to book passage, so he took five hundred dollars belonging to the employer.

Everything and everybody conspired with him to cheat the law and help him out of the country. His name was William Jennifer in those days. He intended to change it in any case, but not in the circumstances that arose.

AFTER leaving the office on that fateful evening he went directly home. His landlady told him that Robert Paget, a fellow clerk, had called to see him and would call again.

Had they made a discovery at the office? Jennifer showed fear; he said to the landlady: "If he calls again, tell him I am still out. I don't like that man."

Long afterward this woman said to her questioners that she took the impression that Jennifer— 'one of the nicest young men she had ever had in her house"— was afraid that Paget meant him some harm.

Leaving the house, Jennifer set out for the ship that was to take him abroad. He walked along the river dock for a distance of a hundred yards. He wanted to turn over in his mind the whole of the scheme he had planned.

It was very dark at the time, but he had no difficulty in recognizing Paget, who came out of the shadows and called to him:

"Well, this is luck— Sorry I missed you at the house."

Paget was bemused; he had been drinking. He leaned heavily on Jennifer and begged the loan of ten dollars. Jennifer struck him and broke away. Paget shouted wildly: "I'll kill you for that."

Farther down the river bank Jennifer's gaze, following a ray of light from an electric sign, picked out a horrifying thing. It was the body of a young man, lying half-in and half-out of the water. Suicide! Perhaps. The bullet wound had completely disfigured the face.

An age-old subterfuge occurred to the escaping Jennifer; he searched the body and exchanged as much clothing as he believed to be necessary, leaving innocuous letters of his own in order to strengthen the alibi. Then he slid the gruesome thing back into the tide.

During the journey back to Tilbury Docks the only fear that assailed him was the possibility of Paget having already communicated to the Chief his suspicions or knowledge of the embezzlement. He would do it in the hope of improving his own position in the office.

The cargo boat that took a few saloon passengers loomed out of the darkness. There was something friendly about its scarred ribs and littered decks and its few lights— it offered sanctuary for just such a fugitive, as the liners were watched by the police; an ugly old tramp of this description was beneath their notice.

They were making ready to cast off when he reached the dock. Nobody had any time to waste on Jennifer. He was expected in the name of Arnold Chester; the only steward merely glanced at his ticket and showed him to his cabin, saying that he must be prepared to put up with a little inconvenience until the morning, by which time they should be around the Foreland and heading down channel. True he didn't sleep that night, but he felt that every throb of the engines was taking him nearer the new life he hoped to begin.

There were only three or four passengers— leaving England for England's good. One of them broke through Jennifer's reserve next day and was interested to learn that he was bound for Australia.

The man was able to tell him all about life on a sheep station; he himself might have made a fortune out there, he said, but drink had been his handicap. He had vision, and he convinced Jennifer of that fact. He was generous in giving away his ideas.

Jennifer absorbed them, but subconsciously. He allowed the man to talk unceasingly; it kept his own thoughts from dwelling on what he had left behind.

They were steaming east; therefore, there were no newspapers to overtake them. They touched Columbo and Penang and Singapore, but the vernacular press in those places didn't waste money on cabled reports of minor embezzlements.

Eastward, into the sunshine, forgetting the past, reaching out to the new life! Jennifer applied himself diligently to the task of creating a new personality. Arnold Chester subjugated William Jennifer— effaced and forgot him. In the privacy of his cabin he practised dissimulation in anticipation of awkward questions that might come from a wholly unexpected quarter.

He talked in whispers to himself, and placed himself in the position of the other man who might say: "Are you William Jennifer?" He rehearsed the attitude he must take up and the facial expressions that should make the interrogation seem ludicrous.

HE conceived and committed to memory a plausible story of the antecedents of Arnold Chester. Often he had read of a tiny flaw in a circumstantial story that brought about the conviction of an accused person; he was not to be trapped in that way; there should be no loose end in his scheme of deception.

From the moment he reached Australia he became an exile in every sense of the word. He made his way into the bush, where men are taken for what they are and not for what they may have been. They don't ask questions about a man's past.

Jennifer was a strong, healthy fellow and physically capable of taking care of himself in any company. As Arnold Chester he went from one sheep station to another. The ideas that had been passed on to him by his fellow passenger he passed on to those for whom he worked.

They were impressed, and generously they gave him credit for being able to use his brains. This was the life, he told himself, for which he had heen designed in the beginning. The work he was doing now seemed to expiate his offense in an earlier day.

He became his own judge and jury and completely exonerated himself. There was a niche for him in life, after all; he had been justified in seeking it and allowing nothing to stand in the way of his attaining it.

Success began to surge around him. He couldn't make a mistake in the vocation he had chosen; a few years, and he was comparatively wealthy. He

would have been completely happy if it hadn't been for the ghost of a fear that was positively indefinable.

He would ask himself again and again what it was that seemed to be trailing after him in the darkness, reaching out a hand and withdrawing it. In the quiet of the night he would go over the story he had concocted and try to discover any slip.

Only seldom did he ponder the identity of the man whose dead body he had slipped back into the River Thames that night when he was making his way to Tilbury. He tried to find solace in the belief that it was a Divine intervention by which a man of his undoubted gifts might be saved to the world.

LOVE came to him. He married the daughter of another sheep farmer, and she brought a fortune as her dowry. To him the money meant little, for he had already built up a large fortune of his own. But, in herself, she was a gift from heaven itself. The beauty, of her face and form was beyond describing; and the beauty of her mind and nature was not less. He lived for her, and she for him, he told himself that without her life would be a dreary routine.

And two years after they were made man and wife she died, leaving a son as a legacy!

Even in the hour of his greatest grief he did not think of her death as a link with the incident of the past. In work he found the true palliative; he gave of his best for the sake of his boy and the world; it was a tribute to the memory of the woman whom he had loved with all his heart and soul.

And now, after many years, Arnold Chester had returned to England, bringing with him his son, Ambrose. He wished that Ambrose had been present at the dinner that night; he would have been very proud of the old man.

Chester turned from the mirror to answer the call on the telephone.

"Hello, son! Where are you speaking from?"

"Margot's place."

"Well, well? Tell me the news? Is the romance as strong as ever?"

"Greater and stronger than you can imagine, Dad," said the boy.

Mr. Chester laughed pleasantly into the phone.

"Is it possible to bring her here tonight?" he asked.

"We are coming along immediately," said Ambrose.

An hour passed. Then Ambrose brought his future wife into the presence of his father for the first time. The pride of the boy touched the beautiful.

"Dad," he said, "this is my Margot. I know you'll love her almost as much as I do."

Chester smiled paternally on the girl who looked up into his face with eyes that were full of yearning.

"My boy's happiness means everything to me," he said.

"Margot was afraid that your wealth might make a difference. because she

"Not likely, my dear," said Chester.

"Didn't I tell you, Margot, that Dad is the most broad-minded man in the world," said Ambrose. He turned to his father: "There's something that she wants to tell you, Dad. She's told me and prefers to tell you herself... . I'll leave you for a few minutes. Now, darling, go ahead." He went outside of the room, leaving his father gazing curiously at the door which had been closed.

"Well, my child, why don't you tell me?" he said.

She was biting her lip; the tears were starting.

"I daren't let go of this great joy that's come to me," she said, "but I can't deceive you.... My name is not Deering! We had to change it— my mother and I— years ago. She died afterwards."

He asked: "Why did you change the name?"

"Because of my father," she replied, and looked down at the floor.

"What— what had he done?" Chester asked, and he was listening to echoes that came across the years.

"He was charged with murdering a man on the bank of the Thames," she said. "I don't believe that he did it. My mother wouldn't believe it either."

"Charged with murder?" Chester's voice was hollow.

"The murder of a man named William Jennifer— his body was taken from the water about six months after death."

"And the name of your father?" Chester's lips remained apart. It seemed incredible.

"Robert Paget."

"What happened to him?"

She whispered three words that boomed in his ears like surf on a broken shore.

"He was hanged!"

Chester stared again at the door; he seemed to be afraid that it might open.

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7: The Assignment that Failed

Clarence L. Cullen

1870-1922

The Popular Magazine, 15 Oct 1911

"DENNISON, c'm'ere," said Waddell, the city editor, in his ordinary speaking tone. He did not take his eyes from the assignment book lying open before him, but merely held out a crooking index finger. This is the city editor's way of summoning some particular slave or the world in general. But invariably it is an effective way. Dennison, lounging at his desk, a good twenty-five feet from where the city editor sat, heard his name, and saw the beckoning finger at the same time. A man who has lolled in the local rooms of newspapers for a good many years, waiting for assignments, comes to know, through the psychical process known as the "hunch," the moment when he is due to be called by the city editor. And it behooveth him to know, and to be on the watch.

"Anybody going to be at the hotels to-day?" inquired the city editor—never removing his gaze from the fascinating assignment book—when Dennison stood beside his desk.

Dennison "did the hotels" as a steady assignment, but took his share of general or special assignments on the days when no interviewable possibilities— personages of actual or imaginary importance—happened to be registered at the Chicago hotels.

"Secretary of- the Treasury's at the Auditorium," replied Dennison, not in any hushed tone of reverence whatever in mentioning the title of that distinguished member of a forgotten cabinet. "But the afternoon papers'll pump him dry. He spills all the chatter there is. I got him for two columns last time he was here, three weeks ago. Cagy guy. Talks, but doesn't say anything."

"H'm— my idea of nothing to print is an interview with a secretary of the treasury— any secretary of the treasury," said the city editor, glancing up at Dennison, through thick, nearsighted glasses, with an agreeable smile. (Yes, this is a violation of the stereotyped newspaper story, which inevitably makes the city editor a crab and a grouch, just as it infallibly attends to it that the cub reporter shall make good. But no matter.) "About a stick and a half'll do for this one this trip. I'll get one of the rewrite men to grab it out of the afternoon papers. Any other chatty worthies at the hostelries that you know of?"

It was Dennison's turn to grin. Exalted individuals don't visit Chicago in droves in midsummer. So Dennison, in combination with another hotel reporter, had been manufacturing important persons, and writing astonishing "interviews" with them in order to hang on to his hotel assignment, which was technically known as "soft." One of these "interviews" had been with a purely hypothetical "member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies," whom Dennison

had "quoted" at great length as to the immediate likelihood that the Pope would abandon the Vatican in Rome, and establish the Holy See in Berne, Switzerland. This one, copious excerpts from which were cabled, had caused the chancellories of Europe to sit up and take strained notice, until it was discovered that the "interview" had been printed in a Chicago newspaper, and that the "name" of the member of the Chamber of Deputies, given as "Elffipo," spelled "O Piffle!" when turned around. Another "interview" had been with "the Baron Kalnoky, son of the prime minister of Austria," in which the junior baron had been made to patter with prolixity as to the German war lord's intention of dismembering the Empire of Austria-Hungary upon the death of Francis Joseph. Dennison would have "got this one across," had not the Baron Kalnoky, the prime minister of Austria, sent a laconic cablegram to another Chicago newspaper, stating that if he really had a son running loose in Chicago he was both surprised and shocked at himself, 'seeing that, although he was an old man, he had never taken the time to get married. And so Dennison felt that he had a grin coming. `

"I might make the rounds and see if there are any live ones on the registers,"' he suggested craftily. Something seemed to tell him— the "hunch" method gives seasoned reporters this sort of prescience, too— that City Editor Waddell had him slated for some special assignment of the "bug" variety; and Dennison, on these scorching afternoons, liked the dim corners and the electric-fan-created coolth of the spacious hotels, where, between reflections of the quenchful variety, he could scribble "talks" with suppositious tourists, "temporarily in Chicago," about the pearl fisheries of Ceylon, the increasing strength of the Chinese army, and such easy and engaging topics.

"Er— uh— or dead ones," brittley tacked on the city editor, his smile touched with sardonicism this time. For a moment, while Dennison rather uneasily shifted his weight to the other leg, the city editor resumed his absorbed contemplation of the assignment book. Then: "Ever ride on a locomotive, Dennison?" he asked, looking up suddenly at the reporter.

The blow had fallen. Dennison saw that it was going to be a "bug" assignment— a ride on a locomotive, and the thermometer at ninety-eight!

"Not that I remember," he replied huskily. "Never was very keen for those T.R. stunts."

"Um— er— well, I can't get Teddy to write me his impressions of locomotive riding, and so you'll do," said the city editor, the flattery obviously unintentional. "Midnight ride on an engine— get it? Fiery, untamed descriptive junk in your lurid vein— glare of headlight, roar of— er— roar of passing scenery, foolish purple cows being huriled through the air—that sort of thing. You're to make the little junket tonight. There'll be a special engine waiting for

you at the I.C. Station at midnight, and you'll be catapulted down the line to Bevanston— that will be far enough for you and the picture kid to catch the idea.

"Write the yarn as if the engine had been hitched on to the St. Louis Express— see? Tried to make arrangements for you to make the engine of that train, but it's against the road rules. So the I.C. people offered us the special engine. But that won't stop you from writing the stuff as if you'd really been aboard the express locomotive. You'll go fast. enough, don't worry— I've fixed that.

"Get off at Bevanston, and go to sleep there, and dig into town to-morrow forenoon, and write the story. Want a page of it, with the pictures, for paper day after to-morrow. Got to stick a few seethes in the way of summer specials into the old sheet, with things as dull as they are. Make this a nifty one, son. I want to show that doodle-witted Sunday editor of ours that he doesn't know a local special when he sees it with a Yerkes binocular— that he— er— um— send Hollister to me, will you?"

Hollister was the local staff stunt artist. Dennison, surcharged with gloom, sauntered into the "art room" —so termed because half a dozen ageyellow and dauby originals of Sundaysupplement drawings were pasted against the board partition separating the room from the local room—and found Hollister affectionately patting a pass which he had just succeeded in squeezing from the reluctant sporting editor for the next day's ball game.

"His nobs," said Dennison, jerking a finger in the general direction of the city editor's desk; and Hollister, shooting a questioning glance at Dennison, went in, and got his instructions from the city editor about the kind of pictures that were to go with the midnight-ride-on-the-locomotive story. Hollister had a look of crumpled misery when he returned to the "art room," and found Dennison gazing stonily out of a window.

"Ain't it the lid-off limit?" groaned Hollister. "And me all dated up for one o' those 'raus-mit'im' parties tonight over at the West Side Turnverein Garden, with the Teutonic eats and the Tyrolean dolls all planted, and yes, and b'gee! I'll have to miss the ball game to-morrow, after I had to rope and tie and buck and gag that mucilaginous-mitted sporting editor for a pass! I can't do these doodadded pictures tomorrow and go to the game, too, and

"More bugology, that's all," gloomily cut in Dennison. 'Serves us right for working on one of these billy-bedinged, saffron-beetle sheets. Serves us - perfectly right-o. I wish now that I'd played it up that that bum Secretary of the Treasury had staked me to the hint that he was going to spring a new bond issue or something, and that he was going to dish the story out to me

exscoopively— if I'd-had the stall ready to do that maybe I'd have flagged this greasy engine job."

"Uh-huh— fine for you, but I'd have caught it, all the same," mumbled Hollister, digging viciously at a caked pipe with a knife blade.

So they fell to condoling with each other— not, from their angle, without some justification. The pair had been assigned to a lot of the "bugological" stories of the kind newspaperishly known as "summer specials for the daily." A fortnight before they had gone up in a huge captive balloon to get a story on "How Chicago Looks From the Sky," and had both been made scandalously airsick from the tugging and rocking of the wind-tossed gasbag.

Shortly before that, in Rube-and-Zeke make-ups, they had 'made the Sunday rounds of the fashionable South Side places of worship, to get a story on "How Wealthy Chicago Churches Treat the Strangers Within Our Gates." And there had been a raft of other "insectuous" assignments, as Dennison called them, handed out to the pair by a city editor who, while neither a grouch nor a crab, possessed a highly developed penchant for "tossing action and spunk into the daily," as he expressed it.

"Oh, well, we've got the afternoon and evening to ourselves, anyhow," said Dennison, at the end of the growlfest. "Me for home and a romp with the kids; and about seven hours in the pajams, holding down the shucks. Meet you about nine— nine do for you?— at the billiard room of the Great Northern, and we can nudge in a game or so of Kelly pool, and buck up for this fool bullgine ride."

"Home and hay for mine, too," said Hollister, who was unmarried, but scheduled for marriage at an early date; and the two went their respective ways, to build up a little edifice of sleep for themselves against the hour of rejoining for their grimy assignment.

ABOUT ONE O'CLOCK on the following morning, Jim Hinton, the fat news editor of the *Globe*, waddled swiftly from the telegraph room to the local room, and slapped a bulletin, just yanked from the typewriter of the operator on the "special" key, on the desk of Cox, the night city editor.

The jowly, usually ruddy face of the news editor was pale under the perspiration beading his hanging cheeks, and he nervously bit off and expelled half-inch chunks of his unlighted cigar. The night city editor shot a questioning glance at the veteran news editor, for whom pallor or visible indications of repressed excitement or -strain were novelties, and then read the bulletin, which ran:

Unattached locomotive on I.C., loaned with crew by road for *Globe* service, leaving I.C. station, Chicago, shortly after midnight, ran full speed through open switch into roundhouse

twelve miles south of city, turning completely over in turntable pit, locomotive boiler exploding, partially wrecking roundhouse. *Globe* men and engineer and fireman probably under locomotive, which is turned completely upside down in pit. Wrecking crew on way. More later. REED.

Operator Z-N Block Station, I.C.R.R.

The night city editor, as he read, gripped the yellow slip of paper more tightly in his fingers, and his face suddenly became even chalkier than the news editor's.

"That means Dennison and Hollister!" he gasped.

The fat news editor bit off and disposed of another chunk of his dry smoke, and nodded.

"Yep, Dennison and Hollister,' he said huskily. Then, after a little pause, "Decent: fellers, too, both of 'em," he added, and waddled over to a window, and gazed out at the murky night, through which were beginning to rip sharp flashes of zigzag lightning preluding a heavy wind-and rainstorm advancing upon the town from the lake.

Three copy readers, late men, glanced up, looked curiously at the drawn features of the night city editor, and then removed their eyeshades. It takes a good deal to arouse the interest, much less the curiosity, of a copy reader. But they had subconsciously caught fragments of the few words that had passed between the night city editor and the news editor, and they were puzzled.

"Whats up, Cox?" asked one of them. "What's that you said about Dennison and Hollister?"

"Poor devils are under a locomotive in a roundhouse pit," replied Cox absently. Then, suddenly electrified by the news instinct, he pulled himself together, and, pushing back his chair, jtmped to his feet. "Here, Chandler, and McBride!"

The two emergency men of the reportorial staff, engaged at that moment in whittling down cable and telegraph news in a far corner of the local room, clattered out of their chairs, and were at the night city editor's desk in a few strides. Cox pointed to the bulletin lying on his desk. Each grabbing a corner, they read it.

"Get out there, you two," directed the night city editor, with hoarse succinctness. "Freeze onto the first automobile or taxi you can Snag. Get the story. Chandler, you're in charge. Phone in your stuff. You can make an outline story for the first edition. On your way!'

The two men, seasoned reporters, were into their coats, and bolting for the stairs— they had no time to wait for a sleepy night-elevator man—before the night city editor's directions were fairly out of his mouth.

"I'll send a couple more men to help you as soon as I can nail 'em," Cox, stepping swiftly into the hall, called after them. "See that Dennison and Hollister are got out of the pit without delay— use the paper's name for that— we'll send an undertaker from this end."

Then Cox, his head down, walked slowly back from the hall to his desk.

"Poor devils!' he muttered to himself.

The fat news editor turned away from the window, and skillfully made it appear that he was only employing his handkerchief to mop the perspiration from his bedewed brow.

"Decent little fellers, those two," he repeated, forgetful of the fact that both Dennison and Hollister were six-footers, and therefore towered fully six inches over him; and he waddled softly back to the telegraph room, shaking his head as he bit off chunks from another unlighted cigar.

The three copy readers readjusted their green eyeshades, and picked up their mutilating pencils, but somehow they were not ready to return to their work of ripping to tatters the work of the men who had turned in night assignment stuff.

"Some writer, that Dennison," said one of them, in a low tone, to the others, as he tapped with the blunt end of his pencil on the copy before him. "Had the right idea of condensation. Nifty descriptive style. Never had to chop his stuff much."

"Had a novel about half finished," said one-of the other copy readers. "Often worked until daylight on it. Liable to be a winner, fellow told me who read some of it. Rotten luck, to cash in like that, eh?"

"Yes, and Hollister was a comer, too," put in the third of the copy readers. "Vigorous, kapoo style, he had, and he'd have been strong at the cartoon thing, too, if they'd have given him any show at it here. Had several offers to go to New York, but wouldn't grab any of 'em, because his folks live here, and his girl's folks, too— girl he was going to marry in October— the one that plays the small parts with the stock company."

The night city editor, fluttering the leaves of the reporters' address book to find two or three men to send to the scene of the accident by telephoned directions, glanced nervously out of the windows when the terrific storm of wind, accompanied by flashes of arabesque lightning and terrific peals of thunder, suddenly broke. He was thinking about Chandler and McBride, probably just starting on their motor ride to the roundhouse, of the likelihood of telephone and telegraph wires being put out of business, and of other matters that afflict night-working newspaper men at critical junctures.

He was picking up the telephone to call up some of the married reporters, whom he could rely upon as being at home and abed, when the managing

editor, with the absorbed, benevolent brown eyes and the bushy white beard, trudged into the room, clutching a handful of proofs.

"Er— uh— Mr. Cox, did the board of aldermen take any action on that gas franchise at their meeting, or—"

He suddenly broke off, for, over the iron rims of his thick glasses, he noticed the oddly strained expression on the night city editor's face.

"Er— is there anything the matter, Mr. Cox?" he inquired, with a blandly baffled air.

The night city editor: briefly told the absorbed old managing editor, wrapped in contemplation of civic plunder by rapscallion franchise thieves, what was the matter. The kindly old gentleman looked pained.

"Dennison, did you say?" he inquired, after a moment's pause. "I seem to remember Dennison— tall young man, wasn't he? How long had he been employed here?"

"Only been on the paper six years," replied the night city editor, the sarcasm not very veiled.

"And Hollisman— oh, yes, Hollister," said the managing editor, missing the mild barb. "How Jong had he been reporting for the—"

"Wasn't a reporter," cut in Cox, sighing drearily. "Hollister was an art man on the local staff. Been here four years."

There was a pause. The old managing editor stroked his Merlin beard, and looked thoughtful.

"It is very unfortunate," he pronounced then. "Poignantly unfortunate. Regrettable in the extreme. The *Globe*, of course, will see to it that their interment is properly provided for." He paused again, fingering his snowy beard. "Er— did the board of aldermen take any action on that gas franchise at the—"

But the night city editor dumbly shook his head to flag a repetition of the inconsequential question, and the old managing editor, meaning everything benign, shuffled out, immersed, to his own room. The very old ones who have been through the newspaper grind for forty or fifty years, see such a panorama of tragedy that each succeeding tragic office incident becomes, to their old, tired view, more and more secondary and subservient to the job in hand— that of getting out the paper.

THE NIGHT CITY EDITOR was answering, between thunderclaps, the inquiries of three or four of the other Chicago morning papers, which had been bulletined as to the roundhouse accident, as to whether anything further had been heard, when the night manager of the telephone company cut in to tell him that the storm was putting the whole service to the bad; and in the midst

of his talk the telephone manager's voice suddenly broke off, and the wire died.

Cox, turning to clap the receiver onto the hook, saw Waddell, the city editor, walking into his own room from the hall. Waddell wore a cheerful expression, and was softly whistling an air from an extravaganza he had heard at one of the roof theaters that night. He had dropped into the office on his way home from an after-theater bite, to dodge the storm. Cox knew by the whistling that Waddell didn't know. He stepped quietly into the city editor's room. Waddell, looking contented and relaxed, was tipped back in the revolving chair before his desk, fanning his face with his straw hat.

"Lo, Coxy— how's she headin'?" he inquired chipperly, when the night city editor stepped into the room.

Cox, without a word, handed him the yellow bulletin. The city editor sat up straight in his tip-back chair, and spread the slip out on his desk, to get a better light on it. He read it through two or three times, without moving a muscle. Then, still without moving, he stared straight ahead of him into a pigeonhole of his desk for two or three minutes, saying nothing, a man wholly stunned. Then, slowly turning his head, and looking up at Cox with a wan, drawn face, the city editor groaned:

"Great cats! And I sent those two boys on the assignment! I sent them!"

"Buck up, Waddy, and forget that part of it," said Cox, placing a hand on the other man's shoulder. "Anybody could have. sent the poor chaps"— his voice broke a little— "on the assignment; it was in the course of the grind. Forget it. Better be sending an undertaker out there, hadn't we?"

The city editor nodded. The night city editor mopped his face, took a turn or two up and down the little room, and then stopped again, with a hand on the city editor's shoulder.

"And about their womenfolks— how about that?' he asked. "Wires are all down— can't get em by phone. Glad of it, for that one reason. Hate to be the one to tell Dennison's wife— dandy little woman, and she had Dennison rated as somebody in a class by himself. And he was, dammit!" He had to fight the hoarseness of his voice to go on. "Three kids, too," he added drearily.

"It'll be my job to tell her," said Waddell then, in a very low tone. "It's up to me. I'll go out to her home after a while, and see her. If it hadn't been for me they wouldn't be— wouldn't be—" He let the phrase go unfinished.

"Rot!" said Cox soothingly. "They were boys that knew how to play the game, not the cry-baby kind. Nobody could blame you. Get that out of your system. Look here, weren't you acquainted with that nice-looking girl that Hollister was engaged to— learning to be an actress with the Columbia Stock Company, wasn't she?"

Waddell nodded again.

"I'll have to tell her, too, after I see Dennison's wife," he said, after a pause. "Fine girl— known her since she was a baby. I'll see her and tell her—tell her who sent 'em, too. It's up to me." He got up, plunged his hands into his trousers pockets, and, with head sunk on his breast, panthered up and down the room. "If only something had happened to keep me from sending them!"

He plumped back into his chair with a groan, and the night city editor, abandoning his comforting job as hopeless, went back to the local room, and tried all of the telephones, with a degree of patience very unusual in a night city editor, to get in touch with Chandler and McBride, who he felt sure had reached the roundhouse by this time. But the telephone system had gone temporarily dead, as had the "special" telegraph wire. So Cox, having no one else to send at that hour, put on his coat, and, after a word of cheer for Waddell, went out to find a downtown undertaker to send to the roundhouse.

NEARLY half an hour later the city editor, still huddled broodingly in his chair, and with all of the lights in the room turned off, heafd the clang of the elevator door, a sound not frequently heard on the editorial floor at three o'clock in the morning, with most of the men gone, and the paper almost "up." Waddell, chin in palm, gazed down the long, dimly lit hall, expecting to see Cox, now a bit overdue from the undertaker's, step from the dark elevator, and emerge into the light.

Instead, two figures stepped from the elevator, linking arms as they did so, and sauntered up the hall toward the local room. Waddell, in the darkness of his little room at the end of the hall, up which the two tall figures lounged easily and chattily, gripped the arms of his chair.

The two men were Dennison an Hollister.

There was a cheerful, condescending grin on Dennison's face, befitting, a man who has just won eighteen games of Kelly pool to the other fellow's seven, and each game having a thirst quencher as a prize and reward of merit. But Hollister did not appear to be taking his defeat to heart. If anything, his grin was broader than Dennison's. But of course the thirst quenchers had gone both ways at the end of each game.

"I think I could ha' put th' bee on you that last game, neighbor, if I'd only—"

Hollister was saying it, but he broke off at a nudge from Dennison. Dennison could sit up for three nights running, and still retain his keenness of vision. And Dennison had caught sight of Waddell sitting, with hands tightly gripping the arms of his revolving chair, in the dim little office of the city editor at the end of the hall.

"Nix— we're nailed," whispered Dennison, and Hollister followed Dennison's gaze, and saw the situation, too.

The city editor got up, rather totteringly, to receive them. They had tó pass through the stream of light from the local room to get into- the little office. But it is against the profoundest principles of copy readers ever to look up from the desk or table at which they are playing ten-cent limit after they are through with their work. They were thus engaged; it was to slip into this game that Dennison and Hollister, after their joyous evening at Kelly pool, had returned to the office; and the copy readers did not see them as, answering the silent invitation of the city editor, they passed through the stream of light and entered the little office.

When they had entered, Waddell closed the door and switched on the lights. He gazed at them steadily, from one to the other. Later, at the Press Club, he told some of the older men how he had longed to grab them both around the middle, and stake them to a grizzly hug of gladness. But he didn't do anything like this, for city editors are wonderful adepts at the art of self-repression, as well as other kinds of repression.

"Well?" he said sepulchrally.

Dennison turned a guilty grin upon Hollister. Hollister gave it right back to him.

"Did you fellows accidentally miss that locomotive trip?" asked Waddell, sepulchrally again.

"Well, yes, accidentally, seeing that you're decent enough to suggest the lie,' said Dennison. "Anyhow, we missed it. If I had a two-weeks'-old fox terrier pup that couldn't write a story of a night ride on an engine, with one paw tied behind his back, without actually taking the engine ride, I'd chuck him into the lake."

"That goes for the pictures, too," chanted Hollister recklessly.

The three men heard a commotion in the local room. Chandler, just in, was fairly shouting to the copy readers:

"Dennison and Hollister, bless the old sons o' guns, weren't on that engine at all! They missed it, and the engineer, thinking they weren't coming, started for the roundhouse, and ran into a switch into the wrong roundhouse. Engineer and fireman jumped, and only got bruised up— and Denny and Holly, th" ol' rummies, are all right! Wow-ee!"

"Whee!" cheered the three copy readers— and cheering is an almost uncannily unusual thing in copy readers.

There was a big lump in Waddell's throat, but he fought it down, and his face took on a heavy scowl.

"And so you two fellows fell down on your assignment, did you? Laid down on me, eh? All right. You're both fired! Get that? Fired!"

And the city editor grabbed his hat, and stormed out of the office.

Dennison and Hollister gazed blankly at each other, then grinned.

"Oh, well, if we're fired, we might as well nudge into this little piking game, and cop some o' the change," said Dennison, and they walked in upon the amazed copy readers and Chandler— who told them all about it— and spent a very agreeable and profitable two hours at ten-cent limit with the mutilators of reportorial copy.

But they were not really-and-truly fired, A few days later the city editor sent them out on a "summer special for the daily": "How Chicago Would Look in a Mirage as Seen Upside Down From a Lake Steamer," and they did the yarn gorgeously.

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8: Buried Alive

E. W. Hornung

1866-1921

The Queen, 26 Aug 1899

Creator of Raffles, the gentleman crook, and brother-in-law of Conan Doyle, English Hornung spent two years in Australia as a young man, much of it in the outback of New South Wales. Those two years had a huge impact on him which remained for the rest of his life.

HIS Excellency the Governor had done a very foolish thing. Charmed with his colony, he had ventured up country incognito, to see a certain small station there for sale, and said to be the very thing for an English nobleman desiring a safe investment and occasional sanctuary in the Australian bush.

Considering the matter for a single instant, to say nothing of going into it to this extent, was not, however, the height of the Governor's folly. This was reached when his Excellency bought one of the station horses instead of the station itself (which duly disappointed him), and insisted on riding unattended back to town.

To be sure, the distance was not much more than one hundred miles, and the Governor was an old cavalry officer, who even in Australia had nothing to learn about horses. But he had everything to learn about the bush, and an innate spirit of adventure stood him instead of the specific knowledge only to he bought by specific experience.

For the greater part of the first day, however, things went wonderfully well with the distinguished horseman. He flatly refused to be escorted beyond the station boundary, where he shook hands with his late host, who alone knew the secret of his identity and who had provided him with letters of introduction in which that secret was not betrayed.

It was then ten o'clock and a glaring morning in early February; but there was little glare among the pungent, dark-hued, gum trees that overgrew the ranges as the boulders that strewed them were overgrown with moss , and my Lord Hartley grinned a guilty grin of boyish satisfaction as he puffed his short pipe in his second-hand colonial saddle, and let his unclipped, long-tailed nag pick its own way down the primitive mountain path.

Two hours later Lord Hartley met with his first adventure. He had come without mishap to the so-called township where he had to have his lunch, and had taken with the landlord the tone which he was accustomed to employ towards people of that kind. It was not a bullying tone, but it was curt and decisive, it brooked not argument or delay, and in this case it caused the

Governor of a colony to take off his coat and fight one of its meanest publicans before he could obtain a bite for man or beast.

In due course both proceeded on their way, the rider with a cut lip and broken knuckles, watched out of sight by a landlord who had received a sovereign for a half-crown's fare, and a sound thrashing for his independence.

This spoilt his Excellency's day. His triumph afforded him no sort of satisfaction: on the contrary, it left him with an uncomfortable feeling that he was not playing the game. If he travelled incognito he had obviously no right to expect special consideration by the way, nor had he conseiously expected anything of the kind. He had merely spoken as he was in the habit of speaking— that was his first and last mistake. To "hide" the person who instantly offered to "hide" was a necessary consequnce of that initial blunder. Lord Hartley blamed himself, however, and conned his lesson as he rode on.

No need to explain that this was a pretty new Governor; an older hand had not embarked on such an escapade. Lord Hartley began to feel that he had learnt more of the colonial character already that day than in all the months he had been installed in Government House.

And now he was beginning to learn something of the bush.

A bush "road" he discovered was seldom more than a mere track, and as often as not the track was invisible to untrained eyes. At first he left it to his new bush horse, but as the animal got beyond his bearings, and itself diverged more than once his Excellency was reduced to dismounting and examining the ground with his eyeglass. And he asked his way of all and sundry, thus accumulating a variety of directions to choose from at every turn. Worst of all, his horse disappointed him; he had bought it fat off the grass. It proved too soft for the distance and his weight, and weakened perceptibly as the afternoon advanced.

The entire day's journey had been estimated at something over thirty miles, and for some time Lord Hartley had felt convinced that he must have covered the distance and more. It was true that the pace had seldom exceeded an amble, yet the rider received a shock when he calculated that he had been eight good hours in the saddle. According o his last informant he was still half-a-dozen niles from his destination for the night.

Of ourse he had been grossly misled first or last, either the thirty miles was nearer fifty, or he lad long since been thrown off his course. It pus too late, however, for harking back. Already the sun was down behind the trees; he only plan was to push on and ask more questions than ever, in the hope of getting an honest answer in the end.

The last question which Lord Hartley asked brought, the goal three miles nearer at bound, and so delighted his lordship that he presented his informant

with five shillings. The end of his troubles seemed at hand. He had simply to turn up a lane and go through the sliprails at the end, where he would find a track leading straight to the station at which he was to spend the night.

His Excellency looked at the sun, and used his spurs for the first time for some hours. There was no sun to look at when he reached he lane at a laboured canter; and it proved possible to canter in the lane itself, which was heavy with rank grass, and very long indeed. When at last it terminated with the ronused sliprails it was too dark to see much rack beyond.

Unfortunately Lord Hartley imagined he could see one far ahead, and, mounting after he had replaced the rails, urged his tired beast to a last effort which raced him out of sight of all human landmarks. What he had taken for a track proved to be a narrow waterhole; track there was none, thence or thither, though his lordship dismounted again and wasted all his matches in the search. He could not even way he had, come, so dark was the night, so unimpressible the tough grass, so like one another the everlasting gums.

It must have been a couple of hours later when Lord Hartley saw the light. It took him the best part of another hour to reach it in a bee-line. And this was the most interresting period of all the vice-regal misadventres. His lordship had been leading his horse, but now he remounted, set his teeth on an oath and his eyeglass on the light, and henceforward veered not to the right nor to the left. He rode through a lagoon of unknown depth.

He dragged his horse over a wire fence. He opened a gate and pulled up in a pack of barking dogs. The light still shone in the window of a low building; now glimmered also in an open doorway, and a man advanced, quelling the dogs.

"Is this the station?" inquired Lord Hartley.

"What station?"

"Kilmarnock. "

"Not it!"

Lord Hartley sat motionless in his saddle. "I suppose there is such a place as Kilmarnock station?"

"There is."

"You really know of its existence, ah?"

"I do."

"That's something! Is it far away?"

"Thirteen or fourteen miles."

Lord Hartley gave it up. Three or four miles would have been beyond his horse. Besides, he was himself tired out.

"And what's the name of this station?" he asked.

"It isn't a station: it's a selection."

"My luck is out," sighed Lord Hartley. "I have a letter of introduction to the people at Kilmarnock, and I was going to propose that I should deliver it to you instead."

"Keep it in your pocket," said the selector. " You talk like a blessed new chum. I suppose you're too fine for mutton and damper and a blanket on the floor? If not, jump down, and hang the introduction!"

So the Governor of that colony added a little more to his new knowledge of the colonial character, and with the knowledge came its complement of wisdom, which permitted his Excellency to accept this uncouth invitation in the tone and spirit in which it had been given. Lord Hartley could be hail-fellow himself when he forgot his dignity, and he made a successful effort to forget it now.

Before his steed was in the stable, he and the selector were good friends. An hour later they lit their pipes with the same faggot, while the selector's wife removed the remnants of a satisfying supper, and forthwith dutifully disappeared. Lord Hartley pulled off his long boots, stretched his silk socks to the fire, and lay-back in the worn armchair with feelings in which he had scarcely hoped to indulge that day. He could congratulate himself on his enterprise after all.

It was proving richer in valuable experience than he had dared to hope.

The very vicissitudes were so much practical experience in a school through which all colonial Governors ought to go; moreover, they would tell very well at Government House when it was all over; and the fight at the wayside inn—even it might leak out and be handed down, when it could scarcely redound to the discredit of the victor.

This selector, with his fine upstanding figure, his rough and ready tongue, and his few hundred acres under strenuous cultivation, was a distinct type, and one to he himself strenuously cultivated by any Governor desirous of attaining direct insight into the real life of his colony. So for the last hour Lord Hartley had asked a question whenever his mouth was empty, and carefully attended to the answer during the process of mastication.

Now he was less acquisitive but more observant. Revelling in his ease and his fatigue, he began to take note of an interior as obviously typical as the selector himself, and was most struck by a log-chimney, the hammerless gun over the rude chimney-piece, the plated spurs hanging from a rusty nail. What he could not note, since it hung behind him, was his own portrait in the centre of a calendar of vast proportions. He was, therefore, much startled when his attention was called to it, not indeed without preamble, hut with a preamble that was worse than one.

"Are you often mistaken for the Governor?" The selector spoke out of a brown study, and in a quieter voice than seemed to be his wont; but the guilty guest started as though he had been stung.

"What Governor?" he queried, to gain time.

"The new Governor of this colony— the Earl of Hartley."

"Lord Hartley," said that nobleman, involuntarily (the selector blew at his pipe to hide a smile); "he's not an earl. Yes— aw— to be sure— now you speak of it. We are said to be something like each other. Why do you ask?"

"Turn round and you'll see." Lord Hartley was only too thankful to do so, and to study his own countenance at some length, while he recovered his composure, (and the selector indulged in an open grin).

The portrait made him younger than he was, and it omitted the gray stubble which he had purposely grown on this surreptitious jaunt. On the whole he was surprised that the selector had seen a likeness which he felt sure was not strong enough to convict him unless he chose to confess. And he did not see why he should confess. It was not a very large matter, but he felt inclined to preserve his incognito as long as possible, and the selector's next words both reassured him and decided him on the point.

"He ought to make a good Governor," said he. "I was glad when I heard a Hartley had got the billet."

"Indeed," said his Excellency, pricking up his ears as he resumed his seat. It was the only word he permitted himself, and he was afraid to throw too much curiosity into his tone; nor was it necessary. "You see, I know something about the family," the selector went on of his own accord. "That's why I've got him stuck up there."

"You know something about the family?" Lord Hartley at length ventured to repeat.

"Yes. I come from the old country myself. I was born and bred on the Hartley estate."

"May I—" and his Excellency just prevented himself from inquiring the selector's name.

"So you think well of the family?" he queried instead.

"I do. There's only been one black sheep in it in my time, if not in all time."

A shade fell across the Governor's face, a shade which he was quick, but not quick enough, to quench.

"So there has been a black sheep, has there?" he forced himself to remark.

"One of the worst."

"Not the Governor, I hope?" said his crafty Excellency, wincing none the less.

The other watched him out of narrow eyes.

"No, not his lordship," he said, "or I shouldn't have been glad he'd got the billet, should I?"

Lord Hartley scarcely heeded his slip; curiosity had taken the lead in his emotions. He was running over the tenantry at home— the list was not very long— and trying to recall those who had emigrated in his time. This man must be about his own age, yet he had no recollection of him, though he was a more striking figure than Lord Hartley had realised while his interest in the selector was still impersonal. He had the beak of an eagle and eagle eye, eyebrows like moustaches, and a magnificent beard. Twenty years hence he would he the ideal patriarch. Twenty years since he must have been a singularly handsome young fellow, and yet Lord Hartley was quite unable to recall him. Not that he was given much time to try, for the selector resumed not only the conversation, but the topic which was painful to his guest.

"No, not his lordship," he repeated, "but his elder brother, the one that would have been his lordship if he'd lived. A jolly good job he didn't. He disgraced the name enough as it was. He'd have been in prison if he hadn't fled the country and cut his throat. Cutting his throat was the one good thing Dishonourable Robert ever did."

Lord Hartley picked nervously at his nails, his feet shifted; it was all that he could do to sit still. He veiled his emotion by frowning at his fingers. And he little dreamt how the eagle eyes opposite seized every symptom of his suffering.

"I remember hearing that it happened in America," remarked his lordship, with all the indifference it was in his power to assume.

"It did," said the selector. "I was in the States at the time."

"See anything of him over there?"

And, despite every effort, there was an eager catch in the callous voice.

The eagle eyes lit up. "See anything of him?"

"Only too much, there and in the old country too. Nobody knows how much I was mixed up with Mr. Robert all his life; and nobody but myself knows what an unmitigated blackguard he was!"

Lord Hartley could bear it no more. White and trembling, he sprang to his feet: "You are wrong!" he cried, hoarsely. "Blackguard he may have been, unmitigated scoundrel he was not. I know— better than you! He was my brother!"

The selector started forward in his chair, his fingers twitching on the arms.

"And you own him?" he whispered. "You stick up for him?"

"Didn't I tell you he was my brother? No man ever had a better. He had more temptations than I had, that was all. So now the cat's out of the bag,"

added Lord Hartley, with a grim chuckle. And he had another look at the portrait on the calendar.

"And you let it out to stick up for your brother!" the selector whispered. His voice might have made the other turn, but it did not until it was followed by unsteady steps and the sudden opening of the door. Then Lord Hartley looked round— and found himself alone. And the voice came back to him, and the truth came home.

He rushed out, and in the light from the window, the light that had led Lord Hartley across cruel country from afar, the selector leaned against an unbarked veranda post, with the tears rolling down his cheeks, and glistening even in his heard.

"Bob!"

"Hush! I'm not Bob now. "You never did it after all "

"I thought I'd done as good. I never dreamt of you coming out. Even then— you'd have said there was room for us both?"

"It was not to be, Bob; it was not to be."

"But it is to me. I'm dead and buried in the bush. And you stuck up for me— after all these years."

Tear after tear sprang to his eyes and rolled down unchecked; for both his hands were grasped beyond release. And so for a long time stood the brothers, in the faint light of the single little flame that had brought them together.

But the older head drooped and drooped, and the younger face grew hard and twisted with perplexity. And the younger eyes remained dry.

ABOUT MIDNIGHT the wife awoke, and missed not only her mate but the hum of conversation which had lulled her to sleep.

She sat up. The homestead was like a grave. She slipped out of bed, but hesitated at the door. She had a good husband, and yet she stood terribly in awe of him. His essential superiority, combined with the mystery of that past of which he would tell her nothing, created in the poor woman a humility of which all his kindness could not cure her. She was ever fearful of offending him, though nobody was slower to take offence.

So she stood some minutes at the door before venturing to open it half an inch. The outer room was empty. The lamp was still burning on the table. The outer door stood wide open to the night.

She was a nervous woman, an easy victim to all kinds of fears, and the first sound of the voices outside came to her as a relief; but as she stood and listened her alarm returned twofold. The voices were raised, and raised in anger— the voices of her husband and the stranger whom he had taken in. She flew across the room to the open door. They were pacing side by side under

the stars, at some little distance from the hoase, and she could only catch a word here and there.

"Obstinate" and "idiotic" were two that fell from her husband.

"My mind is made up" and "it's my duty" were the only whole sentences that she could swear to. Both fell from the stranger, and he repeated both many times. But in the end her husband spoke loud enough. " Very well," he said ; "have your way. I'll be ready to start in ten minutes."

"What, in the dead of the night?"

"Yes, now— or not at all."

"But this is flying to the other extreme!"

"It's you who go to extremes. Since your mind is made up you shall lose no time through me."

In less than the ten minutes the selector came in for his spurs. He could not find them. Yet he was almost certain he had hung them on their nail in the evening. He pulled off his boots to have a look in the bedroom. And there was his wife sitting up in bed, with the missing spurs before her on the quilt.

"Where are you going at this hour of the night?"

"How did you know I was going anywhere?"

"I heard you say so."

"You've been listening to us!"

Never had he spoken to her in such a voice. His left hand gripped her shoulder, his right thrust the candle close to her face. It was his first rough act towards her in their married life. The timid woman bore it with a gentle dignity that made him lift his hand hat instant, though he still searched her face with the candle.

"Tell me what else you've heard," he said, "and I'll answer your question."

She told him all without flinching. Her good faith was transparent, and he breathed again. He took her hand kindly in his own, and its coarse, hard-working fibre touched him to the quick, so that once more his voice was as she had never heard it before. It was as soft as it had just been hard.

"You would forgive my hastiness," he said, " if you knew how that man has been annoying me. I won't have him sleep under my roof, so I'm going to set him on his right road."

"Why should you?" cried the wife. "I'd let him find it for himself."

"He couldn't. He's an awful towny. We should have him back in another hour."

But the woman was wondering whether she would ever have her husband; for suspicion had entered her soul, and she knew she was being deceived. Yet she could not bring herself to speak her heart. All she could do was to throw her free hand about his neck and to beg and beseech him not to go. And that

availed her less than nothing— it precipitated a leave-taking whose very tenderness confirmed her every fear.

So they rode away in the starlight, and the woman heard the last of their horses' hoofs, lying solitary in her bed. For an hour they rode through bush as dense as any his Excellency had traversed earlier in the night. Indeed, the country grew worse instead of better, so that very rarely could they ride abreast, and still more rarely did they speak. The selector led the way on a gaunt old stager that twisted and squeezed between trunks and boulders, and slithered into gullies and scrambled out of them, with equal readiness and precision.

The Governor followed as best he could, his face as often as not in his horse's mane, knees hugging the saddle flaps, toes turned in, and imagination see-sawing between the respective sensations of being maimed by the trunk or brained by the branch. It would simplify matters if he were brained. So the first hour passed, without the hint of a path that the Governor could see; as a matter of fact they crossed several. Nor had he any idea in which direction they were going. He was much too occupied to pay attention to the stars, even if he could have sworn to the Southern Cross without prolonged scrutiny. So he never suspected that their course was not a straight one, nor dreamt that at the end of a second hour they were no further from the selection than at the end of the first.

It was then, however, and not before then, that the selector allowed himself to strike a palpable road; a coach route, broad, open, and light as day after the rank wilderness through which it had been hewn. And yet it was the darkest hour of all when the Governor reached it with a cry of relief, and found his brother waiting for him under the stars.

"A nice way to bring you, eh?" said the selector, "Well, I apologise; but behold your reward. A good road all the way back to town, and a township before you get very many miles from this. I should advise you to take a good long spell there. I don't think that horse of yours will carry you much further without one."

The Governor had dismounted to stretch his legs, the other remained in his saddle, and now he leant over with outstretched hand.

"But you're coming with me?" cried the younger man.

"I have come as far as I must."

"You said you were coming."

"I only meant so far. You forget my poor wife."

This was true, and it annoyed his Excellency to he reminded of her.

"But there are a hundred things to talk about," he said irritably. "You have told me so little; we were arguing all the time. Why, I neither know the name you've been, going by nor the name of your place."

From his saddle the elder brother smiled down upon the younger.

"And you never will know either," said he.

On every hand the locusts were chirruping. The selector's horse champed its bit breath of wind stirred the leaves, but for several minutes there was a dead silence between the mounted man and the man on foot.

"Very well," at length said the latter. "I go down and make my arrangements. Then I come back for you."

"You will never find me. If you were to wait where you are till daylight, I would still defy you to ride back the way you've come or any other way!"

"Then I'll follow you now."

"You will find it difficult with that horse."

"Then you shan't go yourself!" And the selector's reins were caught and held.

This was suffered without complaint. Then said the selector in his softest voice: "You can't have considered what you will drive me to do. I am dead and buried to all but you; to all but you I committed suicide years ago. You find me by a fluke— or by fate. It will be your fault if I still do what I'm supposed to have done long ago. I shall not hesitate if you drive me to it."

"But nothing's mine, and I've got everything. I should feel an impostor for the rest of my life!"

"Think it over when vou get back to Government House. Think it calmly and quietly over, and you'll agree with me— at least you'll give in— for my sake. I want to live— I always wanted to. At my worst I liked my life too well to take it. But it won't be worth having if you go and give me away. It's worth having as it is. I'm not disgraced before the world, but I was before, and would be again. That's where you make your mistake. Some things are forgotten; others never. What you've got to forget is to-night, what I never shall forget is the way you spoke of a fellow before you knew. You are leaving me happier than you found me, and you found me far happier than you suppose. As long as I've an acre to clear and a crop to raise from it you may take it from me I shan't be unhappy; and where I've made something of what I've got I'll turn up more. It's a good life— too good for the man you spoke up for. And I've a good wife— too good again! Consider her; consider everything, my dear fellow, when you get back; and— goodbye!"

"We must see each other again!"

"If you think it well when you think of everything, and if you can find me. Goodbye."

"Goodbye, Bob. "

"God bless you, Harry."

"And you— and yours."

It was the last prayer and the least sincere that was soonest answered, for in the little log house among the gum trees sorrow had endured for a night; but joy came in the morning.

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9: The Amazing Adventure of Marmaduke

Arthur Gask

1869-1951

The Mail (Adelaide), 11 March 1944.

MARMADUKE DANGERFIELD, for all his high sounding names, was a very ordinary and commonplace looking little man. Of slight physique, he had light, watery blue eyes and scanty, sandy-colored hair. He did not smoke, he drank sparingly of alcoholic beverages, and he was not much interested in pretty girls.

A bachelor, and living all his adult life in lodgings, he had consumed vast quantities of the indigestible concoctions of bad cooks, with the result that at 37 years of age he was a confirmed dyspeptic and the gloomy possessor of many subsidiary ailments which apparently resisted all attempts to dislodge them.

Flitting from doctor to doctor as a bee flits from flower to flower, besides what they prescribed for him, he was always taking patent medicines, and it was really wonderful how his constitution stood up to everything.

A piano-tuner by occupation, he had literary ambitions and was quite confident that he would one day write a book— exactly what it was to be about he was not certain— which would make him famous. His day dreams were brightest when he was by himself in lonely places, and, in summer, at fine week-ends he would often ride off on his bicycle, far from the city, and, provided with food and a few simple cooking utensils, set up a little camp and sleep under the stars. He always took care, however, to carry with him adequate supplies of whatever medicines he was believing at that particular moment to be necessary for the ensuring of good health.

One evening, upon one of these excursions, he found himself some hundred and twenty miles north of Adelaide, a long way distant from any habitation. It was rocky, treeless country, and he had left all roads behind him, and followed a narrow track leading up to a high range of hills. He pitched his camp among a small cluster of rocks just off the track, choosing this site because there was a well-filled dam close near, and, with the water in it looking clean and clear, he would be able to have a refreshing swim in the morning.

He was boiling his billy in preparation for the evening meal when greatly to his surprise, as the place was so very lonely, a man came into view, bicycling along the track. He stood up to watch him pass by, but the man, catching sight of him, alighted from his machine and proceeded to wheel it over the rough ground to the rocks. He asked Marmaduke if he would let him have a match.

The piano-tuner was only too happy to oblige, and, anxious for a chat, invited him to have a drink of tea. The man at once sat down and it ended in his sharing the whole meal, tinned salmon, cucumber, cheese, and dates, the indigestible things for which, above all others, Marmaduke's soul always craved.

Always confiding, Marmaduke talked freely about himself, and the stranger, though more reticently inclined, told something of his own adventurous life. Only thirty-four, he had been prospector after gold, boundary rider, drover, rabbit-trapper, and a hunter of wild dogs. Marmaduke was an eager listener. Here was the very man, he was sure, who could provide material for a dozen books, and he would have liked to listen to him for hours. Darkness, however, was not far off, and the stranger said he must be moving on, as he had a long ride yet before him.

Disappointed at losing so interesting a companion, Marmaduke asked him to look him up when he was next in the city, and started to search hurriedly in his pocketbook for one of his cards. In his fluster he spilled its contents, and two £5 notes fluttered to the ground. The stranger picked them up, staring hard at them before he handed them over.

Finding his card at last, Marmaduke gave it to the stranger, and the latter put it in his tobacco tin. "Shan't lose it there," he smiled, and then it seemed, he was no longer in such a hurry to go. He related more of his adventures, and finally suggested that, as he was feeling so tired, he should pitch his camp there, too, for the night.

Marmaduke expressed himself as delighted, and added laughingly, "And I'll be able to give you a nice little night cap to make certain of a good sleep. I've got some whisky in my flask, and it'll do us both good."

So, while the stranger was preparing his bed, Marmaduke got the whisky ready. He always had a tot at night, because in it he nearly always put a sleeping tablet. His latest doctor had prescribed some, which, he said, were extra strong, and warned him never to take more than one at a time. Marmaduke, however, often exceeded the instructions of his medical advisers and that night, feeling stiff after his riding, was intending to take a double dose.

Their final preparations for bed ready, they drank the whisky to each other's healths and a good night's rest. The stranger tossed his down in one big gulp, and then licked over his lips with a rather frowning face.

"What whisky is that?" he asked curiously. "Got a bit of a rum taste, hasn't it?"

"No, I don't think so," replied Marmaduke, drinking his more slowly. "It's good Scotch," and then, all in a flash, to his consternation, he realised what

had happened. It was in the stranger's mug he had put the two sleeping tablets!

For the moment he was on the point of blurting out the unfortunate mistake he had made. Instantly, however, he thought better of it. It might, perhaps, frighten his new-found friend, and, if he kept silent, no harm would be done. So he said nothing, and, lying back comfortably, the two talked on for another hour or so. Presently the conversation lapsed, and, after a few moments, with some amusement Marmaduke heard loud snores.

"He's settled now," he grinned, "and I hope I go off soon, too."

But it was a long while before he dropped off, and then his sleep was broken. The night had turned chilly and he cuddled into his blankets, afraid that he would be catching cold. Many times he woke up and every time he heard his companion's loud snores. Towards morning, however, his sleep became deeper, and it was broad daylight when he finally woke up for good. Indeed, even then he might not have awakened if it had not been for the barking of a dog and the loud baaing of sheep. He sprang to his feet to see a man driving a mob to the dam.

He moved over to waken the stranger. In his sleep the latter had thrown off the upper part of his blanket, and there was a big, hefty-looking knife which must have fallen out of his pocket by his side. At the sound of Marmaduke's voice he sat up with a jerk, and from his startled appearance evidently could not take in where he was. He scowled— and then his eyes fell upon the man with the sheep, who was coming up to speak to them.

"Here, you!" called out the man angrily. "You've no business to have lit a fire there. One spark and you would have had all this paddock alight. It's folk like you who bring all these bushfires on us. You value your miserable cup of tea more than the lives of hundreds of sheep and thousands of pounds' damage to other people's property. Now you just clear off. You're not to light another fire."

The stranger said nothing, but Marmaduke was full of protestations and assurances of the care he always took. The man, however, ignored everything he said, and then without another word just stood watching them until they had collected their things together and ridden off on their bicycles. The two went different ways, and Marmaduke was annoyed at the curt, unfriendly nod the stranger gave him in parting. The weather looked as if it was going to break, and, fearful of catching cold, Marmaduke rode the whole way home that day.

A week passed, and one Monday evening Marmaduke returned home to his lodgings to find two stern-faced men waiting to speak to him. "We're

police," said one of them nastily. "We want to know where you were on Saturday afternoon."

Marmaduke was frightened at his menacing tone and looked as guilty as anyone could be of anything he was going to be accused of. "Why, at home here," he stammered. "I was working in the garden."

"Can you bring anyone to prove it?" asked the detective, and Marmaduke's landlady was at once called in to verify the truth of what he had said. She was dismissed with a nod, and the detective produced an old tobacco tin. "This yours?" he asked, a little bit less roughly. "No! You don't smoke? Well, ever seen this before?"

The trembling Marmaduke shook his head. "No, I haven't," he replied.

"Then how does this card of yours happen to be in it?" snapped the detective. "Did you give it to anyone?"

Marmaduke's eyes opened very wide. "Yes, yes. I do remember that tin now," he exclaimed excitedly. "It belonged to a man whom I met when on a holiday the week before last. I gave him that card of mine to call upon me when he was next in the city, and I recollect him putting it inside to be sure he should not lose it."

"Where did you meet him?" snapped the detective.

"When I was camping on the range between Burra and Clare."

"Not near Gladstone?"

"No, a good fifty miles from there, but why do you ask?"

"Because we want that man very badly. Good heavens! Don't you read the newspapers? Didn't you see about the farmer near Gladstone being murdered?"

Marmaduke went as white as a sheet. Of course he had read about the murder, and it was the main topic on everybody's lips. It had been a dreadful crime in a lonely farmhouse. An elderly farmer had happened to be alone that afternoon, and his wife had returned home to find him lying dead in a pool of blood with his head terribly battered in. The house had been ransacked and more than £300 in notes and some jewellery stolen. So far as the public had heard, there was no trace of the murderer.

"Oh, yes!" he answered shakily. "Of course I've heard about it." His knees shook under him. "But do you think, it was the man I met who did it?"

"Pretty certain," nodded the detective. "This tin was picked up near the house and it must have dropped out of his pocket, as the farmer's wife said she had never seen it before." He put his hand on Marmaduke's arm. "Here, you must come up to the Watchhouse with us and tell your story there."

So for two hours and longer Marmaduke was the centre of interest at the police headquarters. A little shaky, he yet told his story well, bringing in quite dramatically the man being about to ride off until the incident of the dropped £5 notes. He told, too, of his mistake with the sleeping tablets and his seeing the knife by the stranger's side when he woke him up in the morning.

"Gad! But you were lucky," exclaimed the Chief Inspector. "You'd have been cold meat right enough if you hadn't doped him off. Now you just give us a good description, of what he was like."

Here, however, Marmaduke was a rotten reed to rely upon, and the police were most disgusted when they found he could give them no adequate description at all. He said the man was neither dark nor fair and just ordinary looking. He didn't know what color his hair was, as he had kept his cap on all the time, even when he had gone off to sleep. Also, he wasn't certain if he were either tall or short and he couldn't remember the exact color of his eyes. Of only one thing was he sure, and that was that he would be certain to recognise him again if he saw him.

The following day he was taken up in a police car to where his camp had been and the man with the sheep run to earth. With the latter the police had another disappointment, as the man had no recollection of what Marmaduke's companion had been like. Certainly, he stated, he remembered Marmaduke, but only because the piano tuner had excused himself so volubly and, he added rudely, had looked such a fool.

Weeks went by and the murderer was no nearer being caught. A reward of £500 was offered, and it became the obsession of Marmaduke's life to earn the money. Every day, all day long, he was on the look-out. Morning, noon, and night, whenever his work permitted, he promenaded up and down the main streets of the city. He stood outside cinemas, he loitered by tobacco shops, and he frequented bars. Many times he thought he saw the stranger at a distance, but a closer inspection always disappointed him. Often his hard staring annoyed people and more than once he was threatened with unpleasant consequences.

Longer than two months had passed, and then one afternoon he almost jumped out of his skin. He saw the stranger passing just by the town hall.

He was sure of it! He was certain it was he! But he hesitated, with his heart beating like a piston. No, he wasn't quite so sure! This man was well dressed and looked spic and span. In a way he was quite different, and yet—

The man was smoking a cigarette and walking towards Victoria square. In a perfect agony of doubt Marmaduke followed him. The man turned into Flinders street and made straight up to a car parked by the kerb. He opened

the door, and then— something happened and Marmaduke leapt upon his back and clasped him tightly in his arms.

"Help! Help!" he shrieked to a passer-by. "This man has picked my pocket! He's got my wallet on him! I felt him take it!"

With an oath the man tried to fling Marmaduke off, but Marmaduke clung tightly until a little crowd was gathered. "Don't let him get away!" he panted. "Don't let him get into his car!"

A policeman came running up, and Marmaduke again shrieked his accusation. The man shook with rage and denied everything, but the policeman ordered sternly they should both come with him to the Watchhouse.

It was close, and Marmaduke thrilled to see in the charge-room a detective to whom he was well known.

"This man," began the policeman, indicating Marmaduke, "charges this gentleman with picking his pocket. He says—"

But the excited Marmaduke had now recovered his breath and interrupted shrilly: "No, I don't say that now. I only said it to get him brought here." His voice choked again, so that he could only speak with difficulty. "He's the—!" He almost shrieked. "He's the Gladstone murderer. He's the man I gave my card to."

A few brief seconds of stunned silence followed, and it was seen the well-dressed man had gone as white as a sheet. Suddenly he sprang over to Marmaduke and lunged him a fearful blow, but the policeman knocked his arm up just in time and seized hold of him as he made a dash for the door.

"I followed him up King William street," cried the exultant Marmaduke, "but I wasn't sure till I saw him spit, and then I knew. He was spitting a lot that night when he was talking to me."

The man's guilt was obvious straight away, as the murdered farmer's watch was actually found on him. Also, his fingermarks were identical with those on the chopper with which the farmer had been killed.

In due time he was hanged, and when all the facts became known Marmaduke was the hero of the hour. His photograph was in all the newspapers and everybody wanted to talk to him. He got the £500 reward, and on the strength of it married a pretty young lady reporter who had come to interview him. A bouncing, sandy-haired boy quickly eventuated, and Marmaduke's supply of patent medicines was at once cut off. The wife insisted that the baby and the dopes were too expensive luxuries to be allowed together.

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10: The Soul of the Great Bell

Lafcadio Hearn

1850-1904

In:*Some Chinese Ghosts*, 1887

She hath spoken, and her words still resound in his ears.
—Hao-Khieou-Tchouan: c. ix.

THE WATER-CLOCK marks the hour in the *Ta-chung sz'*,— in the Tower of the Great Bell: now the mallet is lifted to smite the lips of the metal monster,— the vast lips inscribed with Buddhist texts from the sacred *Fa-hwa-King*, from the chapters of the holy *Ling-yen-King*! Hear the great bell responding!— how mighty her voice, though tongueless!— *KO-NGAI!* All the little dragons on the high-tilted eaves of the green roofs shiver to the tips of their gilded tails under that deep wave of sound; all the porcelain gargoyles tremble on their carven perches; all the hundred little bells of the pagodas quiver with desire to speak. *KO-NGAI*!— all the green-and-gold tiles of the temple are vibrating; the wooden goldfish above them are writhing against the sky; the uplifted finger of Fo shakes high over the heads of the worshippers through the blue fog of incense! *KO-NGAI!*— What a thunder tone was that! All the lacquered goblins on the palace cornices wriggle their fire-colored tongues! And after each huge shock, how wondrous the multiple echo and the great golden moan and, at last, the sudden sibilant sobbing in the ears when the immense tone faints away in broken whispers of silver,— as though a woman should whisper, "*Hiai!*" Even so the great bell hath sounded every day for well-nigh five hundred years,— *Ko-Ngai*: first with stupendous clang, then with immeasurable moan of gold, then with silver murmuring of "*Hiai!*" And there is not a child in all the many-colored ways of the old Chinese city who does not know the story of the great bell,— who cannot tell you why the great bell says *Ko-Ngai* and *Hiai!*

NOW, this is the story of the great bell in the Ta-chung sz', as the same is related in the *Pe-Hiao-Tou-Choue*, written by the learned Yu-Pao-Tchen, of the City of Kwang-tchau-fu.

Nearly five hundred years ago the Celestially August, the Son of Heaven, Yong-Lo, of the "Illustrious," or Ming dynasty, commanded the worthy official, Kouan-Yu, that he should have a bell made of such size that the sound thereof might be heard for one hundred *li*. And he further ordained that the voice of the bell should be strengthened with brass, and deepened with gold, and sweetened with silver; and that the face and the great lips of it should be graven with blessed sayings from the sacred books, and that it should be

suspended in the centre of the imperial capital, to sound through all the many-colored ways of the City of Pe-king.

Therefore the worthy mandarin, Kouan-Yu, assembled the master-moulders and the renowned bellsmiths of the empire, and all men of great repute and cunning in foundry work; and they measured the materials for the alloy, and treated them skilfully, and prepared the moulds, the fires, the instruments, and the monstrous melting-pot for fusing the metal. And they labored exceedingly, like giants,— neglecting only rest and sleep and the comforts of life; toiling both night and day in obedience to Kouan-Yu, and striving in all things to do the behest of the Son of Heaven.

But when the metal had been cast, and the earthen mould separated from the glowing casting, it was discovered that, despite their great labor and ceaseless care, the result was void of worth; for the metals had rebelled one against the other,— the gold had scorned alliance with the brass, the silver would not mingle with the molten iron. Therefore the moulds had to be once more prepared, and the fires rekindled, and the metal remelted, and all the work tediously and toilsomely repeated. The Son of Heaven heard, and was angry, but spake nothing.

A second time the bell was cast, and the result was even worse. Still the metals obstinately refused to blend one with the other; and there was no uniformity in the bell, and the sides of it were cracked and fissured, and the lips of it were slagged and split asunder; so that all the labor had to be repeated even a third time, to the great dismay of Kouan-Yu. And when the Son of Heaven heard these things, he was angrier than before; and sent his messenger to Kouan-Yu with a letter, written upon lemon-colored silk, and sealed with the seal of the Dragon, containing these words:—

"*From the Mighty Yong-Lo, the Sublime Tait-Sung, the Celestial and August,— whose reign is called 'Ming,'— to Kouan-Yu the Fuh-yin: Twice thou hast betrayed the trust we have deigned graciously to place in thee; if thou fail a third time in fulfilling our command, thy head shall be severed from thy neck. Tremble, and obey!*"

NOW, Kouan-Yu had a daughter of dazzling loveliness, whose name— Ko-Ngai— was ever in the mouths of poets, and whose heart was even more beautiful than her face. Ko-Ngai loved her father with such love that she had refused a hundred worthy suitors rather than make his home desolate by her absence; and when she had seen the awful yellow missive, sealed with the Dragon-Seal, she fainted away with fear for her father's sake. And when her senses and her strength returned to her, she could not rest or sleep for thinking of her parent's danger, until she had secretly sold some of her jewels, and with the money so obtained had hastened to an astrologer, and paid him a

great price to advise her by what means her father might be saved from the peril impending over him. So the astrologer made observations of the heavens, and marked the aspect of the Silver Stream (which we call the Milky Way), and examined the signs of the Zodiac,— the *Hwang-tao*, or Yellow Road,— and consulted the table of the Five *Hin*, or Principles of the Universe, and the mystical books of the alchemists. And after a long silence, he made answer to her, saying: "Gold and brass will never meet in wedlock, silver and iron never will embrace, until the flesh of a maiden be melted in the crucible; until the blood of a virgin be mixed with the metals in their fusion." So Ko-Ngai returned home sorrowful at heart; but she kept secret all that she had heard, and told no one what she had done.

AT LAST came the awful day when the third and last effort to cast the great bell was to be made; and Ko-Ngai, together with her waiting-woman, accompanied her father to the foundry, and they took their places upon a platform over-looking the toiling of the moulders and the lava of liquefied metal. All the workmen wrought their tasks in silence; there was no sound heard but the muttering of the fires. And the muttering deepened into a roar like the roar of typhoons approaching, and the blood-red lake of metal slowly brightened like the vermilion of a sunrise, and the vermilion was transmuted into a radiant glow of gold, and the gold whitened blindingly, like the silver face of a full moon. Then the workers ceased to feed the raving flame, and all fixed their eyes upon the eyes of Kouan-Yu; and Kouan-Yu prepared to give the signal to cast.

But ere ever he lifted his finger, a cry caused him to turn his head; and all heard the voice of Ko-Ngai sounding sharply sweet as a bird's song above the great thunder of the fires,— "*For thy sake, O my Father*!" And even as she cried, she leaped into the white flood of metal; and the lava of the furnace roared to receive her, and spattered monstrous flakes of flame to the roof, and burst over the verge of the earthen crater, and cast up a whirling fountain of many-colored fires, and subsided quakingly, with lightnings and with thunders and with mutterings.

Then the father of Ko-Ngai, wild with his grief, would have leaped in after her, but that strong men held him back and kept firm grasp upon him until he had fainted away and they could bear him like one dead to his home. And the serving-woman of Ko-Ngai, dizzy and speechless for pain, stood before the furnace, still holding in her hands a shoe, a tiny, dainty shoe, with embroidery of pearls and flowers,— the shoe of her beautiful mistress that was. For she had sought to grasp Ko-Ngai by the foot as she leaped, but had only been able

to clutch the shoe, and the pretty shoe came off in her hand; and she continued to stare at it like one gone mad.

BUT in spite of all these things, the command of the Celestial and August had to be obeyed, and the work of the moulders to be finished, hopeless as the result might be. Yet the glow of the metal seemed purer and whiter than before; and there was no sign of the beautiful body that had been entombed therein. So the ponderous casting was made; and lo! when the metal had become cool, it was found that the bell was beautiful to look upon, and perfect in form, and wonderful in color above all other bells. Nor was there any trace found of the body of Ko-Ngai; for it had been totally absorbed by the precious alloy, and blended with the well-blended brass and gold, with the intermingling of the silver and iron. And when they sounded the bell, its tones were found to be deeper and mellower and mightier than the tones of any other bell,—reaching even beyond the distance of one hundred *li*, like a pealing of summer thunder; and yet also like some vast voice uttering a name, a woman's name,—the name of Ko-Ngai!

AND STILL, between each mighty stroke there is a long low moaning heard; and ever the moaning ends with a sound of sobbing and complaining, as though a weeping woman should murmur, "*Hiai!*" And still, when the people hear that great golden moan they keep silence; but when the sharp, sweet shuddering comes in the air, and the sobbing of "*Hiai!*" then, indeed, do all the Chinese mothers in all the many-colored ways of Pe-king whisper to their little ones: "*Listen! that is Ko-Ngai crying for her shoe! That is Ko-Ngai calling for her shoe*!"

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11: One Hundred in the Dark

Owen Johnson

(Owen McMahon Johnson, 1878-1952)
The Saturday Evening Post, 21 Oct 1911

American novelist and short story writer

THEY WERE discussing languidly, as such groups do, seeking from each topic a peg on which to hang a few epigrams that might be retold in the lip currency of the club— Steingall, the painter, florid of gesture, and effete, foreign in type, with black-rimmed glasses and trailing ribbon of black silk that cut across his cropped beard and cavalry mustaches; De Gollyer, a critic, who preferred to be known as a man about town, short, feverish, incisive, who slew platitudes with one adjective and tagged a reputation with three; Rankin, the architect, always in a defensive, explanatory attitude, who held his elbows on the table, his hands before his long sliding nose, and gestured with his fingers; Quinny, the illustrator, long and gaunt, with a predatory eloquence that charged irresistibly down on any subject, cut it off, surrounded it, and raked it with enfilading wit and satire; and Peters, whose methods of existence were a mystery, a young man of fifty, who had done nothing and who knew every one by his first name, the club postman, who carried the tittle-tattle, the *bon mots* and the news of the day, who drew up a petition a week and pursued the house committee with a daily grievance.

About the latticed porch, which ran around the sanded yard with its feeble fountain and futile evergreens, other groups were eying one another, or engaging in desultory conversation, oppressed with the heaviness of the night.

At the round table, Quinny alone, absorbing energy as he devoured the conversation, having routed Steingall on the Germans and archæology and Rankin on the origins of the Lord's Prayer, had seized a chance remark of De Gollyer's to say:

"There are only half a dozen stories in the world. Like everything that's true it isn't true." He waved his long, gouty fingers in the direction of Steingall, who, having been silenced, was regarding him with a look of sleepy indifference. "What is more to the point, is the small number of human relations that are so simple and yet so fundamental that they can be eternally played upon, redressed, and reinterpreted in every language, in every age, and yet remain inexhaustible in the possibility of variations."

"By George, that is so," said Steingall, waking up. "Every art does go back to three or four notes. In composition it is the same thing. Nothing new— nothing new since a thousand years. By George, that is true! We invent nothing, nothing!"

"Take the eternal triangle," said Quinny hurriedly, not to surrender his advantage, while Rankin and De Gollyer in a bored way continued to gaze dreamily at a vagrant star or two. "Two men and a woman, or two women and a man. Obviously it should be classified as the first of the great original parent themes. Its variations extend into the thousands. By the way, Rankin, excellent opportunity, eh, for some of our modern, painstaking, unemployed jackasses to analyze and classify."

"Quite right," said Rankin without perceiving the satirical note. "Now there's De Maupassant's *Fort comme la Mort*— quite the most interesting variation— shows the turn a genius can give. There the triangle is the man of middle age, the mother he has loved in his youth and the daughter he comes to love. It forms, you might say, the head of a whole subdivision of modern continental literature."

"Quite wrong, Rankin, quite wrong," said Quinny, who would have stated the other side quite as imperiously. "What you cite is a variation of quite another theme, the Faust theme— old age longing for youth, the man who has loved longing for the love of his youth, which is youth itself. The triangle is the theme of jealousy, the most destructive and, therefore, the most dramatic of human passions. The Faust theme is the most fundamental and inevitable of all human experiences, the tragedy of life itself. Quite a different thing."

Rankin, who never agreed with Quinny unless Quinny maliciously took advantage of his prior announcement to agree with him, continued to combat this idea.

"You believe then," said De Gollyer after a certain moment had been consumed in hair splitting, "that the origin of all dramatic themes is simply the expression of some human emotion. In other words, there can exist no more parent themes than there are human emotions."

"I thank you, sir, very well put," said Quinny with a generous wave of his hand. "Why is the *Three Musketeers* a basic theme? Simply the interpretation of comradeship, the emotion one man feels for another, vital because it is the one peculiarly masculine emotion. Look at Du Maurier and *Trilby*, Kipling in *Soldiers Three*— simply the *Three Musketeers*."

"The *Vie de Bohème*?" suggested Steingall.

"In the real Vie de Bohème, yes," said Quinny viciously. "Not in the concocted sentimentalities that we now have served up to us by athletic tenors and consumptive elephants!"

Rankin, who had been silently deliberating on what had been left behind, now said cunningly and with evident purpose:

"All the same, I don't agree with you men at all. I believe there are situations, original situations, that are independent of your human emotions, that exist just because they are situations, accidental and nothing else."

"As for instance?" said Quinny, preparing to attack.

"Well, I'll just cite an ordinary one that happens to come to my mind," said Rankin, who had carefully selected his test. "In a group of seven or eight, such as we are here, a theft takes place; one man is the thief— which one? I'd like to know what emotion that interprets, and yet it certainly is an original theme, at the bottom of a whole literature."

This challenge was like a bomb.

"Not the same thing."

"Detective stories, bah!"

"Oh, I say, Rankin, that's literary melodrama."

Rankin, satisfied, smiled and winked victoriously over to Tommers, who was listening from an adjacent table.

"Of course your suggestion is out of order, my dear man, to this extent," said Quinny, who never surrendered, "in that I am talking of fundamentals and you are citing details. Nevertheless, I could answer that the situation you give, as well as the whole school it belongs to, can be traced back to the commonest of human emotions, curiosity; and that the story of *Bluebeard* and *The Moonstone* are to all purposes identically the same."

At this Steingall, who had waited hopefully, gasped and made as though to leave the table.

"I shall take up your contention," said Quinny without pause for breath, "first, because you have opened up one of my pet topics, and, second, because it gives me a chance to talk." He gave a sidelong glance at Steingall and winked at De Gollyer. "What is the peculiar fascination that the detective problem exercises over the human mind? You will say curiosity. Yes and no. Admit at once that the whole art of a detective story consists in the statement of the problem. Any one can do it. I can do it. Steingall even can do it. The solution doesn't count. It is usually banal; it should be prohibited. What interests us is, can we guess it? Just as an able-minded man will sit down for hours and fiddle over the puzzle column in a Sunday balderdash. Same idea. There you have it, the problem— the detective story. Now why the fascination? I'll tell you. It appeals to our curiosity, yes— but deeper to a sort of intellectual vanity. Here are six matches, arrange them to make four squares; five men present, a theft takes place— who's the thief? Who will guess it first? Whose brain will show its superior cleverness— see? That's all— that's all there is to it."

"Out of all of which," said De Gollyer, "the interesting thing is that Rankin has supplied the reason why the supply of detective fiction is inexhaustible. It

does all come down to the simplest terms. Seven possibilities, one answer. It 196is a formula, ludicrously simple, mechanical, and yet we will always pursue it to the end. The marvel is that writers should seek for any other formula when here is one so safe, that can never fail. Be George, I could start up a factory on it."

"The reason is," said Rankin, "that the situation does constantly occur. It's a situation that any of us might get into any time. As a matter of fact, now, I personally know two such occasions when I was of the party; and very uncomfortable it was too."

"What happened?" said Steingall.

"Why, there is no story to it particularly. Once a mistake had been made, and the other time the real thief was detected by accident a year later. In both cases only one or two of us knew what had happened."

De Gollyer had a similar incident to recall. Steingall, after reflection, related another that had happened to a friend.

"Of course, of course, my dear gentlemen," said Quinny impatiently, for he had been silent too long, "you are glorifying commonplaces. Every crime, I tell you, expresses itself in the terms of the picture puzzle that you feed to your six-year-old. It's only the variation that is interesting. Now quite the most remarkable turn of the complexities that can be developed is, of course, the well-known instance of the visitor at a club and the rare coin. Of course every one knows that? What?"

Rankin smiled in a bored, superior way, but the others protested their ignorance.

"Why, it's very well known," said Quinny lightly. "A distinguished visitor is brought into a club— dozen men, say, present, at dinner, long table. Conversation finally veers around to curiosities and relics. One of the members present then takes from his pocket what he announces as one of the rarest coins in existence— passes it around the table. Coin travels back and forth, every one examining it, and the conversation goes to another topic, say the influence of the automobile on domestic infelicity, or some other such asininely intellectual club topic— you know? All at once the owner calls for his coin.

"The coin is nowhere to be found. Every one looks at every one else. First, they suspect a joke. Then it becomes serious— the coin is immensely valuable. Who has taken it?

"The owner is a gentleman— does the gentlemanly idiotic thing, of course, laughs, says he knows some one is playing a practical joke on him and that the coin will be returned to-morrow. The others refuse to leave the situation so. One man proposes that they all submit to a search. Every one gives his assent

until it comes to the stranger. He refuses, curtly, roughly, without giving any reason. Uncomfortable silence— the man is a guest. No one knows him particularly well— but still he is a guest. One member tries to make him understand that no offense is offered, that the suggestion was simply to clear the atmosphere, and all that sort of bally rot, you know.

"'I refuse to allow my person to be searched,' says the stranger, very firm, very proud, very English, you know, 'and I refuse to give my reason for my action.'

"Another silence. The men eye him and then glance at one another. What's to be done? Nothing. There is etiquette— that magnificent inflated balloon. The visitor evidently has the coin— but he is their guest and etiquette protects him. Nice situation, eh?

"The table is cleared. A waiter removes a dish of fruit and there under the ledge of the plate where it had been pushed— is the coin. Banal explanation, eh? Of course. Solutions always should be. At once every one in profouse apologies! Whereupon the visitor rises and says:

"'Now I can give you the reason for my refusal to be searched. There are only two known specimens of the coin in existence, and the second happens to be here in my waistcoat pocket.'"

"Of course," said Quinny with a shrug of his shoulders, "the story is well invented, but the turn to it is very nice— very nice indeed."

"I did know the story," said Steingall, to be disagreeable; "the ending, though, is too obvious to be invented. The visitor should have had on him not another coin, but something absolutely different, something destructive, say, of a woman's reputation, and a great tragedy should have been threatened by the casual misplacing of the coin."

"I have heard the same story told in a dozen different ways," said Rankin.

"It has happened a hundred times. It must be continually happening," said Steingall.

"I know one extraordinary instance," said Peters, who up to the present, secure in his climax, had waited with a professional smile until the big guns had been silenced. "In fact, the most extraordinary instance of this sort I have ever heard."

"Peters, you little rascal," said Quinny with a sidelong glance, "I perceive you have quietly been letting us dress the stage for you."

"It is not a story that will please every one," said Peters, to whet their appetite.

"Why not?"

"Because you will want to know what no one can ever know."

"It has no conclusion then?"

"Yes and no. As far as it concerns a woman, quite the most remarkable woman I have ever met, the story is complete. As for the rest, it is what it is, because it is one example where literature can do nothing better than record."

"Do I know the woman?" asked De Gollyer, who flattered himself on passing through every class of society.

"Possibly, but no more than any one else."

"An actress?"

"What she has been in the past I don't know— a promoter would better describe her. Undoubtedly she has been behind the scenes in many an untold intrigue of the business world. A very feminine woman, and yet, as you shall see, with an unusual instantaneous masculine power of decision."

"Peters," said Quinny, waving a warning finger, "you are destroying your story. Your preface will bring an anti-climax."

"You shall judge," said Peters, who waited until his audience was in strained attention before opening his story. "The names are, of course, disguises."

MRS. RITA KILDAIR inhabited a charming bachelor-girl studio, very elegant, of the duplex pattern, in one of the buildings just off Central Park West. She knew pretty nearly every one in that indescribable society in New York that is drawn from all levels, and that imposes but one condition for membership— to be amusing. She knew every one and no one knew her. No one knew beyond the vaguest rumors her history or her means. No one had ever heard of a Mr. Kildair. There was always about her a certain defensive reserve the moment the limits of acquaintanceship had been reached. She had a certain amount of money, she knew a certain number of men in Wall Street affairs, and her studio was furnished with taste and even distinction. She was of any age. She might have suffered everything or nothing at all. In this mingled society her invitations were eagerly sought, her dinners were spontaneous, and the discussions, though gay and usually daring, were invariably under the control of wit and good taste.

On the Sunday night of this adventure she had, according to her invariable custom, sent away her Japanese butler and invited to an informal chafing-dish supper seven of her more congenial friends, all of whom, as much as could be said of any one, were habitués of the studio.

At seven o'clock, having finished dressing, she put in order her bedroom, which formed a sort of free passage between the studio and a small dining room to the kitchen beyond. Then, going into the studio, she lit a wax taper and was in the act of touching off the brass candlesticks that lighted the room when three knocks sounded on the door and a Mr. Flanders, a broker,

compact, nervously alive, well groomed, entered with the informality of assured acquaintance.

"You are early," said Mrs. Kildair, in surprise.

"On the contrary, you are late," said the broker, glancing at his watch.

"Then be a good boy and help me with the candles," she said, giving him a smile and a quick pressure of her fingers.

He obeyed, asking nonchalantly:

"I say, dear lady, who's to be here to-night?"

"The Enos Jacksons."

"I thought they were separated."

"Not yet."

"Very interesting! Only you, dear lady, would have thought of serving us a couple on the verge."

"It's interesting, isn't it?"

"Assuredly. Where did you know Jackson?"

"Through the Warings. Jackson's a rather doubtful person, isn't he?"

"Let's call him a very sharp lawyer," said Flanders defensively. "They tell me, though, he is on the wrong side of the market— in deep."

"And you?"

"Oh, I? I'm a bachelor," he said with a shrug of his shoulders, "and if I come a cropper it makes no difference."

"Is that possible?" she said, looking at him quickly.

"Probable even. And who else is coming?"

"Maude Lille— you know her?"

"I think not."

"You met her here— a journalist."

"Quite so, a strange career."

"Mr. Harris, a clubman, is coming, and the Stanley Cheevers."

"The Stanley Cheevers!" said Flanders with some surprise. "Are we going to gamble?"

"You believe in that scandal about bridge?"

"Certainly not," said Flanders, smiling. "You see I was present. The Cheevers play a good game, a well united game, and have an unusual system of makes. By-the-way it's Jackson who is very attentive to Mrs. Cheever, isn't it?"

"Quite right."

"What a charming party," said Flanders flippantly. "And where does Maude Lille come in?"

"Don't joke. She is in a desperate way," said Mrs. Kildair, with a little sadness in her eyes.

"And Harris?"

"Oh, he is to make the salad and cream the chicken."

"Ah, I see the whole party. I, of course, am to add the element of respectability."

"Of what?"

She looked at him steadily until he turned away, dropping his glance.

"Don't be an ass with me, my dear Flanders."

"By George, if this were Europe I'd wager you were in the secret service, Mrs. Kildair."

"Thank you."

She smiled appreciatively and moved about the studio, giving the finishing touches. The Stanley Cheevers entered, a short fat man with a vacant fat face and a slow-moving eye, and his wife, voluble, nervous, overdressed and pretty. Mr. Harris came with Maude Lille, a woman, straight, dark, Indian, with great masses of somber hair held in a little too loosely for neatness, with thick, quick lips and eyes that rolled away from the person who was talking to her. The Enos Jacksons were late and still agitated as they entered. His forehead had not quite banished the scowl, nor her eyes the scorn. He was of the type that never lost his temper, but caused others to lose theirs, immovable in his opinions, with a prowling walk, a studied antagonism in his manner, and an impudent look that fastened itself unerringly on the weakness in the person to whom he spoke. Mrs. Jackson, who seemed fastened to her husband by an invisible leash, had a hunted, resisting quality back of a certain desperate dash, which she assumed rather than felt in her attitude toward life. One looked at her curiously and wondered what such a nature would do in a crisis, with a lurking sense of a woman who carried with her her own impending tragedy.

As soon as the company had been completed and the incongruity of the selection had been perceived, a smile of malicious anticipation ran the rounds, which the hostess cut short by saying:

"Well, now that every one is here, this is the order of the night: You can quarrel all you want, you can whisper all the gossip you can think of about one another, but every one is to be amusing! Also every one is to help with the dinner— nothing formal and nothing serious. We may all be bankrupt to-morrow, divorced or dead, but to-night we will be gay— that is the invariable rule of the house!"

Immediately a nervous laughter broke out and the company, chattering, began to scatter through the rooms.

Mrs. Kildair, stopping in her bedroom, donned a Watteaulike cooking apron, and slipping her rings from her fingers fixed the three on her pincushion with a hatpin.

"Your rings are beautiful, dear, beautiful," said the low voice of Maude Lille, who, with Harris and Mrs. Cheever, was in the room.

"There's only one that is very valuable," said Mrs. Kildair, touching with her thin fingers the ring that lay uppermost, two large diamonds, flanking a magnificent sapphire.

"It is beautiful— very beautiful," said the journalist, her eyes fastened to it with an uncontrollable fascination. She put out her fingers and let them rest caressingly on the sapphire, withdrawing them quickly as though the contact had burned them.

"It must be very valuable," she said, her breath catching a little. Mrs. Cheever, moving forward, suddenly looked at the ring.

"It cost five thousand six years ago," said Mrs. Kildair, glancing down at it. "It has been my talisman ever since. For the moment, however, I am cook; Maude Lille, you are scullery maid; Harris is the chef, and we are under his orders. Mrs. Cheever, did you ever peel onions?"

"Good Heavens, no!" said Mrs. Cheever, recoiling.

"Well, there are no onions to peel," said Mrs. Kildair, laughing. "All you'll have to do is to help set the table. On to the kitchen!"

Under their hostess's gay guidance the seven guests began to circulate busily through the rooms, laying the table, grouping the chairs, opening bottles, and preparing the material for the chafing dishes. Mrs. Kildair, in the kitchen, ransacked the ice box, and with her own hands chopped the *fines herbes*, shredded the chicken and measured the cream.

"Flanders, carry this in carefully," she said, her hands in a towel. "Cheever, stop watching your wife and put the salad bowl on the table. Everything ready, Harris? All right. Every one sit down. I'll be right in."

She went into her bedroom, and divesting herself of her apron hung it in the closet. Then going to her dressing table she drew the hatpin from the pincushion and carelessly slipped the rings on her fingers. All at once she frowned and looked quickly at her hand. Only two rings were there, the third ring, the one with the sapphire and the two diamonds, was missing.

"Stupid," she said to herself, and returned to her dressing table. All at once she stopped. She remembered quite clearly putting the pin through the three rings.

She made no attempt to search further, but remained without moving, her fingers drumming slowly on the table, her head to one side, her lip drawn in a little between her teeth, listening with a frown to the babble from the outer room. Who had taken the ring? Each of her guests had had a dozen opportunities in the course of the time she had been busy in the kitchen.

"Too much time before the mirror, dear lady," called out Flanders gaily, who from where he was seated could see her.

"It is not he," she said quickly. Then she reconsidered. "Why not? He is clever— who knows? Let me think."

To gain time she walked back slowly into the kitchen, her head bowed, her thumb between her teeth.

"Who has taken it?"

She ran over the characters of her guests and their situations as she knew them. Strangely enough, at each her mind stopped upon some reason that might explain a sudden temptation.

"I shall find out nothing this way," she said to herself after a moment's deliberation; "that is not the important thing to me just now. The important thing is to get the ring back."

And slowly, deliberately, she began to walk back and forth, her clenched hand beating the deliberate rhythmic measure of her journey.

Five minutes later, as Harris, installed *en maître* over the chafing dish, was giving directions, spoon in the air, Mrs. Kildair came into the room like a lengthening shadow. Her entrance had been made with scarcely a perceptible sound, and yet each guest was aware of it at the same moment, with a little nervous start.

"Heavens, dear lady," exclaimed Flanders, "you come in on us like a Greek tragedy! What is it you have for us, a surprise?"

As he spoke she turned her swift glance on him, drawing her forehead together until the eyebrows ran in a straight line.

"I have something to say to you," she said in a sharp, businesslike manner, watching the company with penetrating eagerness.

There was no mistaking the seriousness of her voice. Mr. Harris extinguished the oil lamp, covering the chafing dish clumsily with a discordant, disagreeable sound. Mrs. Cheever and Mrs. Enos Jackson swung about abruptly, Maude Lille rose a little from her seat, while the men imitated these movements of expectancy with a clumsy shuffling of the feet.

"Mr. Enos Jackson?"

"Yes, Mrs. Kildair."

"Kindly do as I ask you."

"Certainly."

She had spoken his name with a peremptory positiveness that was almost an accusation. He rose calmly, raising his eyebrows a little in surprise.

"Go to the door," she continued, shifting her glance from him to the others. "Are you there? Lock it. Bring me the key."

He executed the order without bungling, and returning stood before her, tendering the key.

"You've locked it?" she said, making the words an excuse to bury her glance in his.

"As you wished me to."

"Thanks."

She took from him the key and, shifting slightly, likewise locked the door into her bedroom through which she had come.

Then transferring the keys to her left hand, seemingly unaware of Jackson, who still awaited her further commands, her eyes studied a moment the possibilities of the apartment.

"Mr. Cheever?" she said in a low voice.

"Yes, Mrs. Kildair."

"Blow out all the candles except the candelabrum on the table."

"Put out the lights, Mrs. Kildair?"

"At once."

Mr. Cheever, in rising, met the glance of his wife, and the look of questioning and wonder that passed did not escape the hostess.

"But, my dear Mrs. Kildair," said Mrs. Jackson with a little nervous catch of her breath, "what is it? I'm getting terribly worked up! My nerves—"

"Miss Lille?" said the voice of command.

"Yes."

The journalist, calmer than the rest, had watched the proceedings without surprise, as though fore-warned by professional instinct that something of importance was about to take place. Now she rose quietly with an almost stealthy motion.

"Put the candelabrum on this table— here," said Mrs. Kildair, indicating a large round table on which a few books were grouped. "No, wait. Mr. Jackson, first clear off the table. I want nothing on it."

"But, Mrs. Kildair— " began Mrs. Jackson's shrill voice again.

"That's it. Now put down the candelabrum."

In a moment, as Mr. Cheever proceeded methodically on his errand, the brilliant crossfire of lights dropped in the studio, only a few smoldering wicks winking on the walls, while the high room seemed to grow more distant as it came under the sole dominion of the three candles bracketed in silver at the head of the bare mahogany table.

"Now listen!" said Mrs. Kildair, and her voice had in it a cold note. "My sapphire ring has just been stolen."

She said it suddenly, hurling the news among them and waiting ferret-like for some indications in the chorus that broke out.

"Stolen!"

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Kildair!"

"Stolen— by Jove!"

"You don't mean it!"

"What! Stolen here— to-night?"

"The ring has been taken within the last twenty minutes," continued Mrs. Kildair in the same determined, chiseled tone. "I am not going to mince words. The ring has been taken and the thief is among you."

For a moment nothing was heard but an indescribable gasp and a sudden turning and searching, then suddenly Cheever's deep bass broke out:

"Stolen! But, Mrs. Kildair, is it possible?"

"Exactly. There is not the slightest doubt," said Mrs. Kildair. "Three of you were in my bedroom when I placed my rings on the pincushion. Each of you has passed through there a dozen times since. My sapphire ring is gone, and one of you has taken it."

Mrs. Jackson gave a little scream, and reached heavily for a glass of water. Mrs. Cheever said something inarticulate in the outburst of masculine exclamation. Only Maude Lille's calm voice could be heard saying:

"Quite true. I was in the room when you took them off. The sapphire ring was on top."

"Now listen!" said Mrs. Kildair, her eyes on Maude Lille's eyes. "I am not going to mince words. I am not going to 207stand on ceremony. I'm going to have that ring back. Listen to me carefully. I'm going to have that ring back, and until I do, not a soul shall leave this room." She tapped on the table with her nervous knuckles. "Who has taken it I do not care to know. All I want is my ring. Now I'm going to make it possible for whoever took it to restore it without possibility of detection. The doors are locked and will stay locked. I am going to put out the lights, and I am going to count one hundred slowly. You will be in absolute darkness; no one will know or see what is done. But if at the end of that time the ring is not here on this table I shall telephone the police and have every one in this room searched. Am I quite clear?"

Suddenly she cut short the nervous outbreak of suggestions and in the same firm voice continued:

"Every one take his place about the table. That's it. That will do."

The women, with the exception of the inscrutable Maude Lille, gazed hysterically from face to face; while the men, compressing their fingers, locking them or grasping their chins, looked straight ahead fixedly at their hostess.

Mrs. Kildair, having calmly assured herself that all were ranged as she wished, blew out two of the three candles.

"I shall count one hundred, no more, no less," she said. "Either I get back that ring or every one in this room is to be searched, remember."

Leaning over, she blew out the remaining candle and snuffed it.

"One, two, three, four, five—"

She began to count with the inexorable regularity of a clock's ticking.

In the room every sound was distinct, the rustle of a dress, the grinding of a shoe, the deep, slightly asthmatic breathing of a man.

"Twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three—"

She continued to count, while in the methodic unvarying note of her voice there was a rasping reiteration that began to affect the company. A slight gasping breath, uncontrollable, almost on the verge of hysterics, was heard, and a man nervously clearing his throat.

"Forty-five, forty-six, forty-seven—"

Still nothing had happened. Mrs. Kildair did not vary her measure the slightest, only the sound became more metallic.

"Sixty-six, sixty-seven, sixty-eight, sixty-nine and seventy—"

Some one had sighed.

"Seventy-three, seventy-four, seventy-five, seventy-six, seventy-seven—"

All at once, clear, unmistakable, on the resounding plane of the table was heard a slight metallic note.

"The ring!"

It was Maude Lille's quick voice that had spoken. Mrs. Kildair continued to count.

"Eighty-nine, ninety, ninety-one—"

The tension became unbearable. Two or three voices protested against the needless prolonging of the torture.

"Ninety-six, ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine and one hundred."

A match sputtered in Mrs. Kildair's hand and on the instant the company craned forward. In the center of the table was the sparkling sapphire and diamond ring. Candles were lit, flaring up like searchlights on the white accusing faces.

"Mr. Cheever, you may give it to me," said Mrs. Kildair. She held out her hand without trembling, a smile of triumph on her face, which had in it for a moment an expression of positive cruelty.

Immediately she changed, contemplating with amusement the horror of her guests, staring blindly from one to another, seeing the indefinable glance of interrogation that passed from Cheever to Mrs. Cheever, from Mrs. Jackson to her husband, and then without emotion she said:

"Now that that is over we can have a very gay little supper."

WHEN Peters had pushed back his chair, satisfied as only a trained raconteur can be by the silence of a difficult audience, and had busied himself with a cigar, there was an instant outcry.

"I say, Peters, old boy, that is not all!"

"Absolutely."

"The story ends there?"

"That ends the story."

"But who took the ring?"

Peters extended his hands in an empty gesture.

"What! It was never found out?"

"Never."

"No clue?"

"None."

"I don't like the story," said De Gollyer.

"It's no story at all," said Steingall.

"Permit me," said Quinny in a didactic way; "it is a story, and it is complete. In fact, I consider it unique because it has none of the banalities of a solution and leaves the problem even more confused than at the start."

"I don't see—" began Rankin.

"Of course you don't, my dear man," said Quinny crushingly. "You do not see that any solution would be commonplace, whereas no solution leaves an extraordinary intellectual problem."

"How so?"

"In the first place," said Quinny, preparing to annex the topic, "whether the situation actually happened or not, which is in itself a mere triviality, Peters has constructed it in a masterly way, the proof of which is that he has made *me* listen. Observe, each person present might have taken the ring— Flanders, a broker, just come a cropper; Maude Lille, a woman on the ragged side of life in desperate means; either Mr. and Mrs. Cheever, suspected of being card sharps— very good touch that, Peters, when the husband and wife glanced involuntarily at each other at the end— Mr. Enos Jackson, a sharp lawyer, or his wife about to be divorced; even Harris, concerning whom, very cleverly, Peters has said nothing at all to make him quite the most suspicious of all. There are, therefore, seven solutions, all possible and all logical. But beyond this is left a great intellectual problem."

"How so?"

"Was it a feminine or a masculine action to restore the ring when threatened with a search, knowing that Mrs. Kildair's clever expedient of throwing the room into darkness made detection impossible? Was it a woman

who lacked the necessary courage to continue, or was it a man who repented his first impulse? Is a man or is a woman the greater natural criminal?"

"A woman took it, of course," said Rankin.

"On the contrary, it was a man," said Steingall, "for the second action was more difficult than the first."

"A man, certainly," said De Gollyer. "The restoration of the ring was a logical decision."

"You see," said Quinny triumphantly, "personally I incline to a woman for the reason that a weaker feminine nature is peculiarly susceptible to the domination of her own sex. There you are. We could meet and debate the subject year in and year out and never agree."

"I recognize most of the characters," said De Gollyer with a little confidential smile toward Peters. "Mrs. Kildair, of course, is all you say of her—an extraordinary woman. The story is quite characteristic of her. Flanders, I am not sure of, but I think I know him."

"Did it really happen?" asked Rankin, who always took the commonplace point of view.

"Exactly as I have told it," said Peters.

"The only one I don't recognize is Harris," said De Gollyer pensively.

"Your humble servant," said Peters, smiling.

The four looked up suddenly with a little start.

"What!" said Quinny, abruptly confused. "You— you were there?"

"I was there."

The four continued to look at him without speaking, each absorbed in his own thoughts, with a sudden ill ease.

A club attendant, with a telephone slip on a tray, stopped by Peters' side. He excused himself and went along the porch, nodding from table to table.

"Curious chap," said De Gollyer musingly.

"Extraordinary."

The word was like a murmur in the group of four, who continued watching Peters' trim, disappearing figure in silence, without looking at one another—with a certain ill ease.

12: The Toys of Fate

Tod Robbins

(Clarence Aaron Robbins, 1888-1949)

Munsey's magazine, Jan 1921

American author of horror novels and short stories, who collaborated with Tod Browning in the famous horror movie "Freaks", 1932, based on his short stoyr "Spurs", Munseys*, 1923.*

THERE WAS a raucous screaming of brakes, and the train, which had been gliding along smoothly through the night, came to an abrupt, shivering halt. I was violently precipitated against the man who sat opposite me, and he was thrown to the floor.

"I beg your pardon," I said, as soon as I regained my breath and my equilibrium. "I hope you're not hurt."

He was a stout, middle-aged man in a light woolly overcoat. Lying on the floor of the smoking-compartment, his large and melancholy brown eyes staring up at me from his inexpressive face, he closely resembled a sheep awaiting the attentions of the butcher. There was an irritating passivity about his inert figure which was galling in the extreme. My right toe tingled to stir him into a more upright and dignified position.

"I hope you're not hurt," I repeated, but this time there was no sympathy in my tone.

His hands fluttered uncertainly about his plump person.

"No, I'm not hurt," he said at last, rising slowly to his feet. "For a moment I thought that he'd finally taken me out of his pocket; but—"

He broke off and regarded me mournfully with his head on one side.

"I beg your pardon," said I, making no sense out of his words. "You were saying—"

But at this point I was interrupted by the conductor, who bustled in with an air of importance. The somber pride of the tragedian was mirrored on the official's face as he picked up a lantern and lighted it.

"What's the trouble?" I asked.

"A man's been run over," he answered tersely. "Got his foot caught in the switch, and couldn't get away in time."

"Poor devil! Is he dead?"

"I should say so! They tell me he's torn to rags. I'm going up there now. Want to go along?"

"No," I answered hastily. "That kind of thing makes me sick."

The conductor smiled rather contemptuously and strode out into the passageway. A moment later I could see his lantern, one among a dozen or more, gliding past the window like a large, luminous bubble. We had come to a standstill in a deserted tract of swamp-land. The black, brooding night seemed to hang heavily over the earth, like a threatening hand. Not a light glimmered anywhere, except those gay bobbing lanterns which flowed on merrily to the feet of tragedy; not a sound broke the silence, except the far-away murmur of voices and the dismal croaking of frogs.

"He would have chosen such a night!"

I started involuntarily. For the moment I had forgotten the existence of the man in the woolly overcoat. He now sat facing me in his old seat near the window, looking particularly docile, stupid, and altogether aggravating.

"I'm sure I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about," I said rather irritably. "Will you kindly explain?"

"Naturally you wouldn't," he murmured sadly. "And you won't believe me if I tell you the story. You'll think me mad."

"Oh, no, I won't," I hastened to assure him.

I had realized at the first glance that this fellow with the muddy brown eyes was too stupid to be threatened with insanity. Madness, after all, is a mental fungus dependent on rich soil for its growth— the disease of a vivid imagination. Looking at my traveling companion with the trained eyes of a physiognomist, I said with conviction:

"I would never consider *you* insane!"

At this he brightened visibly, as if I had paid him a compliment.

"That's a satisfaction," said he, crossing his plump legs. "To be quite candid with you, Mr.—"

"Burton's my name," said I.

"To be quite candid, Mr. Burton," he continued, "I've been called mad more times than once. And when I haven't been called mad, I've been called a good liar, which is just as insulting."

"Neither is insulting," I replied; "but let that pass. You were about to tell me your story."

"So I was, sir," said he, with a mournful shake of the head. "It all happened a long time ago, when I was living in Prestonville. Perhaps you've heard of Prestonville, Mr. Burton?"

"Prestonville?" I murmured. "Prestonville?" And then memory flashed up in me. "Why, that's the town that was destroyed by an earthquake!" I cried, in the tone of a man making a happy discovery. "There was great loss of life, wasn't there?"

"A frightful loss of life, Mr. Burton! It came after midnight, when people were in their beds, and the houses were bowled over as if they were made of cardboard. There was no warning. All at once the earth began to shake, and then—"

He made a sweeping gesture with his hand.

"It was a thriving town, I understand?"

"Yes, indeed, sir— a progressive town. By this time it would have been a large city. There were enterprising business men who had made their homes there— clean-living, ambitious men, who would have been the pride of the country if they had survived; but most of them were buried under their own roofs. They died with the town." He broke off and rubbed the bald spot just above his right temple, which was glistening with perspiration. "And there was no reason for it all!" he finished, almost fiercely. "If it had been a vicious growth, like some towns in this State, one could call it a visitation of Providence, and explain it that way."

"Can one *ever* satisfactorily explain what happens?" I broke in. "Fate is a blindfolded baby attempting to play chess for the first time."

"No, he isn't!" the man in the woolly overcoat cried excitedly. "I'll tell you what he is. He's an old fellow— a little mad, you understand, but not so mad as not to be vicious."

"You seem positive that you're right," I said with a smile. "Why?"

Before he answered, he drew out a cigar and lighted it with a hand that shook oddly.

"I'll tell you why," he answered very calmly between puffs. "I have met Fate."

"You have met fate?" I, said slowly, trying to figure out his meaning.

"Exactly," he replied with a half-hearted chuckle. "He's a dirty old man with a face white and wrinkled as a paper bag— an untidy old man who drops crumbs in his beard and soup on his vest— an old man who neighs when he laughs, like a frightened horse."

"In spite of his stupid look this man is quite mad," was my thought. But aloud I said: "How did you know that the old fellow was Fate? Tell me about it."

"Willingly," said he. "It unburdens my mind to tell what I know, even though people think me mad. Living and remaining silent is unendurable. I feel that I am hidden away from the world in some black recess— a recess from which I cannot escape, and in which I must wait patiently. Someday his hand will grope about in that recess, touch me, and then—" He broke off and passed his handkerchief across his perspiring forehead. "And when I am finally plucked out into the light of day, what will happen to me? I do not know, nor can I

guess. Perhaps he has forgotten me; perhaps I may be overlooked for years. He has so many playthings, that mad old man!"

"You were about to tell me your story," I ventured.

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"TO BE SURE," the man said in a somewhat calmer tone. "It all happened ten years ago in Prestonville. I was in the toy business then, and had a large shop on Main Street. My show-windows were the delight of every child in town. They would stop on their way to school and stare in, with their noses pressed tight against the glass. And often grown people would stop. You see I had an artistic temperament, and it found expression in my show-windows."

"How?" I asked.

"Well, I arranged scenes like a stage-director. For instance, there was my tobogganing scene. Through the show-window one caught a glimpse of a hill covered with snow and children sliding down it on gaily painted sleds. And then there was my hunting scene in the forest. One saw a miniature bear at bay, surrounded by miniature sportsmen with leveled rifles. The bear growled, opened its cavernous mouth, and struck at the hunters with its heavy forepaws. It was all quite realistic, I assure you."

"No wonder your windows drew a crowd!"

"Yes, one can perform miracles with mechanical toys," he said. "But perhaps my greatest success was my replica in miniature of Prestonville itself. That, indeed, was a work of art. Every street, every house, every tree, was an exact counterpart of one in the town. When I finally put it on exhibition, it interested not only the children but the grown people as well. It was a drawing card which helped my business and quite eclipsed the efforts of my rival across the street.

"Every day hundreds of people would stop to see what was happening in this tiny town of Prestonville; for with great skill I arranged scenes for them— scenes which parodied the happenings of yesterday. It was a clever joke on the town— a harmless joke at which all could laugh, and at which none could take offense. And I was extremely happy in my ability to amuse, when one dark, rainy evening in October he came and peered solemnly through my show-window."

"He?" I asked.

"Yes, that untidy old man I told you of— the old man who dropped crumbs in his beard and soup on his vest— the mad old man whom later I grew to fear worse than death."

ON ACCOUNT of the weather the streets were deserted; and, as there seemed to be little or no prospect of business on such an evening, I had allowed my two assistants to leave before their usual time. I was standing by the counter, staring absently at the rain-splashed windows, when I suddenly saw a dingy coat-sleeve rubbing against the plate glass. A moment later a white, wrinkled face appeared through the space which had been wiped dry, and a pair of small gray eyes stared solemnly down on my miniature of Prestonville.

On first seeing it thus, Mr. Burton, I experienced an involuntary tremor of fear. I had an odd fancy that there was a face out there in the night and nothing more— a face drifting about quite independent of a body— a thin mask with a tangle of wild, disreputable beard hanging from it, and shark's eyes staring coldly through the slits above the cheekbones. But it wasn't what this face held that troubled me, Mr. Burton. No, it was what it lacked— the thinness of it— the feeling that behind its flat, wrinkled surface there was nothing but vacancy. A thin mask of flesh, it had blown off its owner's real face and come floating to my window— or, at least, such was my vague, disquieting thought of it.

For some time I stared stupidly at the face; and it, in turn, stared down on the toy town. From where I stood the scene suggested a picture. The town no longer seemed a group of miniature houses at my elbow, but the real Prestonville at a great distance; and the face, surrounded as it was by the gray mist which had formed on the windowpane, resembled the face of a cruel divinity looking down from the clouds on what it might presently destroy. It suggested one of those religious pictures of old times when man believed God to be capable of an implacable hatred and desire for vengeance. As I stood there, motionless and staring, I actually trembled for my toy town, which by some mysterious flight of the imagination had also become Prestonville.

THE SHOPKEEPER paused and blew a ring of smoke thoughtfully ceilingward.

"All this must sound absurd to you," he resumed after a moment. "In fact, on looking back on it later that night, it seemed absurd tn me that an old man's face should have filled me with such wild notions. You see, Mr. Burton, I'm not ordinarily an imaginative man. I've always prided myself on my practicality."

"How long did he stare through the window?" I asked with growing interest.

"I don't know exactly. It might have been only a minute, but it seemed an age. I remember that my eyes, which have always been weak, winked shut for an instant. When I opened them again, the face had gone. I might have

thought I had dreamed the whole thing if it hadn't been for the clean patch on the windowpane."

"Did you see the face again?"

"Yes, many times; but always when I was alone in the store, or at night. Sometimes I saw it surrounded by other faces, but it was usually by itself. It seemed to pick stormy nights to stare in at the toy town."

"Were you always affected in the same way?" I asked.

"Yes, always. I could not rid myself of the unhealthy feeling that this face was only a mask, like those I sold to children on Hallowe'en. If it had mirrored any human emotion or thought, it would not have affected me so. There was a sickening thinness about it, if you can understand me. It hung over my toy town like an evil moon. Soon I began to dream about it. It was a great relief when the old man finally came into my shop."

"So he came in!" I cried. "That's rather unusual, isn't it? Faces such as you describe seldom trust themselves under the glare of electric lights."

"I knew you wouldn't believe me," the shopkeeper said wistfully. "Nobody does."

"So far I believe you," I answered truthfully enough. "Go ahead."

WELL, AS I WAS SAYING, he finally came in. It was a great relief to see that the face had a body to it; but what a body it was!. Here were old bones, Mr. Burton— the oldest bones I've ever seen outside a graveyard. I give you my word, the man was a walking mummy. I felt the great age of those bones as they moved slowly beneath the parchment-like skin, and they filled me with a kind of awe; but there was nothing to command respect in his shuffling gait, or in his tangle of beard, where breadcrumbs were sticking like currants in a bush, or in his clothes, which were dingy beyond belief, or in his silly senile smile, which set the wrinkles on his face all aquiver, like ripples on a bowl of milk when you stir it with a spoon. All in all, he was as disreputable-looking an old man as the town could boast of— and half-witted as well, if his wagging lower lip did not belie him. But, as I was saying, there was something awe-inspiring in his slow-moving bones— something which filled me with an unaccountable reverence.

Well, he shuffled up to the counter and leaned on it fora space, mumbling to himself, like a man rehearsing a speech. His pale gray eyes were fixed on me, but they didn't seem to see me. He ran his fingers through his beard in a nervous fashion, so that several stray crumbs rolled down his soup-stained vest and fell on the floor.

"Well, sir," I finally said, speaking pleasantly and even respectfully, for I couldn't forget the age of his bones, "what can I do for you?"

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AT THAT he winked one eye at me and snickered. It wasn't a laugh at all, rightly speaking, but more like the neigh of a frightened horse.

"Tut, tut!" says he with a reproving roll of his head. "Don't ask silly questions, young man. You know what I want. Why, I've come for your town!"

"My town?" I cried in astonishment. "You mean you want to buy it?"

"Isn't it for sale?" he asked, cocking his beard at me. "I'll tell you what it is, sir. I've found everything for sale in this world but myself— myself!" He smirked and bowed like a dancing-master in his dotage. "The prices that have been offered me just for a nod or a smile! Ha, they would turn your head, young man! You'd sell your soul for a hundredth part of them; but I? Ah, no! I may not be intelligent, but I'm essentially honest— yes, essentially honest. What do you want for your town?"

"I hadn't intended to sell it," I replied rather weakly, for his torrent of wild words had played havoc with my wits. "You see it's a good advertisement for the shop."

"Come, come, young man!" says he, tapping his nose slyly with a shriveled forefinger. "None of your tradesman's tricks with me! Everything has a price, you know. Out with it!"

At that, Mr. Burton, I took a careful survey of this old man from top to toe, from the dingy felt hat set awry on his head to his mud-splashed boots rich with the red clay of the countryside. I had no intention of selling my toy town, and I meant to ask a price far beyond his ability to pay.

"Well, young man?" he cried impatiently. "Well?"

"Five thousand dollars is the price of that town," I answered, thinking that now I would be rid of him.

You may well imagine my surprise, Mr. Burton, when he pulled out an old leather wallet fairly bursting with bills, and counted five thousand-dollar notes into my palm. One would as soon expect to find a scarecrow stuffed with bank-notes. Here he was, a very beggar of a man in appearance, with a purse whose contents would have done credit to any millionaire! It made my head swim.

"There you have it," said he with one of his snickers. "A very moderate price, I'd say, for such a thriving town. I'm afraid you've cheated yourself, young man." He turned his back on me and stepped over to the show-window. "You shouldn't have kept it so long!" he cried sharply. "You're hopelessly old-fashioned!"

"Old-fashioned?" I muttered.

"Yes, old-fashioned," he said sourly. "You show nothing here except what happened yesterday. What sort of business is that? Now I'm abreast of the times, and sometimes a step or so in advance of them. I may look antiquated, but I'm not. See here!"

As quick as thought, Mr. Burton, this strange old man put his hand in his pocket and drew out a match. Striking it on the heel of his boot, he bent forward and applied the flame carefully to one of the tiny cardboard houses in the town.

"Look out!" I cried. "You'll set it on fire! It's only made of paper!"

"It is on fire," he answered with evident satisfaction, slowly straightening his aged back. "It gives quite a blaze for such a small house." He broke off and regarded me with a strange look of childish innocence on his wrinkled old face. "I love fires!" said he. "Don't you?"

I made him no answer. My eyes were on the toy town and on the tiny cardboard house which was going up in flames and smoke. Instantly I knew which one this mad old man had picked out to destroy— it was the miniature of my own house on Sanford Avenue. There it blazed merrily; and I was moved by the sight of it. Hot anger surged through me against this old fool at my elbow— an anger which was tinged with fear. I felt regret, too, that I had sold my toy town to this destroyer of miniature homes.

At last the toy house crumbled into red-hot ashes, Mr. Burton; and the old man, who all this time had been stretching his hands over the blaze, once more turned to me with an air of triumph.

"You see I'm not old-fashioned!" he cried with a high, neighing laugh. "No— I keep abreast of the times, although I'm so dingy. Who cares about yesterday's doings? We want a peep into the minute ahead, not the minute behind. Do the little figures of wood go with the town?"

"Yes," I answered sourly. "As perhaps you know, each is supposed to represent someone in Prestonville."

"And are *you* included?" he asked, half closing his dull, fishy eyes. "Did you sell yourself as well as the others?"

"I suppose you'll find the wooden mannekin of me in the collection," I muttered, "unless it was burned up in that little house."

"How could that happen?" he said pleasantly. "You've been in this shop all the time. No, not a soul was burned but your mother-in-law." He leaned forward and prodded in the little heap of ashes with his finger. "Here she is, sir," he continued with a grin, holding up for my inspection a tiny charred figure of wood. "Burned to a cinder, you see! Well, you won't miss her much."

And then I smiled weakly, Mr. Burton. I was very much attached to Sally's mother, but I smiled, as almost any man smiles when his mother-in-law's name is coupled with tragedy.

"Of course, I won't miss her much," I answered, with quite the conventional air of gay unconcern.

"Well, that's lucky," he went on, stroking some more crumbs out of his beard; "for, as you can see for yourself, she's well toasted. Not that it makes one iota of difference to me whether you miss her or not," he added fiercely. "To be quite candid, young man, I'm neither very intelligent nor very kind-hearted, and I don't pretend to be, although there are optimistic fools in this world who call me both."

"Indeed?" I said politely.

"Yes," he continued, "they think I sit up at night trying to better the human race— *I*, who have so many amusing things to do. There are people who imagine I'm a cousin of Santa Claus."

"Once removed or far removed?" said I.

At that he began to snicker, Mr. Burton, in a most unpleasant way.

"I wish I could think up bright things like that," he said after a time. "*Far* removed, I'd call it. But seriously, young man, I often kick those fools in the face just to see what they'll do; and, bless me, if they don't come crawling back on all fours to lick my boots!"

"You're a stranger to me," I broke in. "I thought I knew by sight every soul in town. Where are you staying?"

For answer he bent over the toy town and touched with his finger a house which stood a little apart from the others.

"Preston Mansion!" I cried in surprise. "Why, that hasn't been lived in for twenty years— not since old Colonel Preston cut his throat."

"*I* live in it," he said simply.

"But it's in a deplorable state of disrepair," I ventured.

"So am I," he rejoined. "We're good company for each other."

"But the roof's never been shingled since it got hit by lightning two summers back. It can't keep out the rain."

"*I'm* living under that roof, not you!" he replied sharply. "It suits me."

"I'm sure I didn't mean any offense," I said. "Shall I have the toy town sent there tomorrow morning?"

"No, no!" he cried irritably. "I'll call for it when I want it. None of your impudence, young man!"

And at that he shuffled out of my shop, Mr. Burton, without so much as a good-night, leaving me fairly dumfounded. Nothing that I had said could possibly have given offense to the most sensitive person; yet he had left me in

high dudgeon. Later I came to learn that he was always like that toward the end of our talks. It wasn't anything that had passed between us, but just a natural weariness of my society— the same irritability that a child shows when he is forced to stay indoors with his nurse. Indeed, that terrible old man was very much like a spoiled child in a great many ways— his love of excitement; his pure joy in destroying objects of value; his fickleness; and, lastly, his downright fury if he was opposed in anything.

"POSSIBLY," I assented. "But why do you call such a harmless old lunatic terrible?"

"I'm coming to that, Mr. Burton," the shopkeeper replied, with a calm which I could see was forced for my benefit. "Let me get on in my own way, and then you can judge for yourself."

AS I HAVE SAID he left me with my wits all astray, gaping behind the counter; and it was there one of the neighbors found me a few minutes later.

"Come, come!" he cried, shaking me by the arm. "There's been a fire up at your place. Your wife wants you."

"A fire!" I cried, coming to myself with a start. "My house?"

"Burned to the ground," he answered shortly. "But that isn't the worst of it. Your wife's all broken up, I and you must go to her at once. She needs you."

"And Sally's mother?" I cried weakly. "She's safe?"

The man shook his head sadly.

"Lost, I'm afraid," he murmured. "She was the only one in the house when it caught fire, and they think the smoke must have suffocated her, for she hasn't been seen since. Your place was insured, I hope?"

I made him no answer. Stepping to the show-window, I bent down and looked long and curiously at the ashes where once had stood my miniature house.

"It all happened here," I muttered dully. "It happened here before my eyes!"

"Come, come!" my neighbor said brusquely. "Don't break down. Play the manly part. Your wife's the real sufferer, you know. After all, a mother-in-law is only a mother-in-law."

"It all happened here," I repeated stupidly, pointing down at the toy town. "Everything!"

But he did not even so much as glance at the show-window. His eyes were on my right hand, which still grasped what the old man had given me.

"You're drunk!" he cried after a moment. "Perhaps you'd better not go back to your wife in this condition."

All that I had gone through that evening, added to this final affront, made me see red.

"Drunk!" I cried, stepping forward. "Why, you fool, I—"

Unconsciously my right hand opened. From it dropped— not crisp thousand-dollar bills, but half a dozen chocolate creams wrapped up in a piece of tissue paper. The money that the old man gave me had all disappeared!

iv

THE SHOPKEEPER regarded me wistfully. Evidently he still hoped that I might believe his improbable story. The train was once more slipping through the night, only now at a faster pace, to make up for the enforced delay. I could see nothing through the window but a curtain of moving blackness, could hear nothing but the monotonous lullaby of the revolving wheels; but I was vaguely conscious of the sky which overhung us, somber and threatening, like an immense, hovering hand.

"Well, what do you think?" he said at last, a trifle timidly.

"I think that you were badly frightened by a coincidence," I answered. "Of course, it was strange that the old man should have burned your house in miniature; but those things happen. I remember once—"

"But how about my mother-in-law?" he broke in.

"Another strange coincidence— startling enough, I grant you."

"But can you explain how the money turned to chocolate creams?" he demanded.

"Well, as for that," I answered, "probably it was a sleight-of-hand trick. No doubt your mad old man was a practical joker with some knowledge of parlor legerdemain. Those fellows can fool even the brightest eyes, and you acknowledge that yours are weak."

"You have common sense," he said bitterly, "and all that I told you is an affront to it. You argue very much as I used to argue before I met that terrible old man for the second time and learned the truth."

"He came into your shop again?"

"Yes, a week after my mother-in-law's funeral. He came in just as my nephew went out. They must have met each other at the door. I can still remember the old man's first words as he hobbled up to the counter."

"I DON'T like that boy," he said peevishly, his cold gray eyes fixed on my face. "He aggravates me."

"That's a pity," I answered ironically.

You must know that I was very fond of my sister's son, Mr. Burton. There wasn't a cheerier, better-natured boy in Prestonville than Charlie, though I say it myself. He was a bit mischievous, perhaps, but there was no malice in it. He was a real boy who showed that he was glad to be alive.

"No, I don't like him," the old man continued, plucking irritably at his tangled beard. "He's happy— entirely too happy. Why, the little fool goes hopping about this town like a canary! When he isn't whistling, he's grinning like an idiot. The way he acts, you wouldn't think that I existed. He ignores me, and that's the truth of the matter— me, whom nobody should ignore." He paused and twitched a gray hair savagely out of his beard. "Besides," he finished, "I can't abide round-eyed, apple-cheeked boys! Can you?"

"I'm very fond of Charlie," I answered warmly. "Of course, he's happy. Why shouldn't he be? He's strong and healthy."

"Strong and healthy, eh?" the old man cried, with one of his unpleasant snickers. "Well, that can be mended. Have you any toy trolley-cars in your shop— the kind that you wind up and run?"

"Yes, I have several," I answered; "but what do you want with one?"

"Never you mind," he said with a sly wink. "Never you mind, sir. Perhaps I'm buying it for Charlie. When I don't like children, I buy them toys— not at all like Santa Claus, you see!"

Now, Mr. Burton, he was grinning at me so slyly, with his beard ruffled out like the tail of a turkey-cock, and his eyes shifting from side to side, that, in spite of the strange fear I had of him, it was all I could do to keep from bursting out into a laugh. Here was this mummy of a man puttering about my shop like a child of ten. A toy trolley-car, indeed!

And yet there was a childish sincerity about him, an eager curiosity to see the stock of toys, which stroked my business pride the right way. There he stood as I brought out my supply of cars, bending forward in wonder, and actually sucking his thumb.

"Here they are," said I from between twitching lips.

"A nice assortment," he said gravely; "a very pretty lot of trolley-cars. Now I wonder which would be best suited for Charlie. Let's see!" He bent lower still, so that his gray beard brushed the counter. "I rather fancy this one without a fender," he muttered. "It looks more businesslike than the others. Do you wind it up with a key?"

"Yes, here's the key," I answered, holding it out to him. "And there's where it winds up, right behind the rear seat. Do you want to see it run?"

"Indeed I do," he said eagerly. As he spoke, he picked up the toy and began to wind it. His beard twitched with excitement, and he hopped about as nimbly as a goat. "This is what I call fun!" he cried.

"Put it on the counter," I suggested. "It'll run along there all right."

He shook his head. "No, no," said he. "That's silly. Who ever heard of a trolley-car running on a counter? There's just one place for it. Look here!"

And as quick as thought, Mr. Burton, he skipped over to the window and placed the trolley-car on one of the streets of my toy town.

"Here's the place for it— right on Main Street!" he cried joyously. "Now I'll let her go. Ding dong! All aboard!"

"It will do damage there," I told him, stepping forward. "There are people on that street. It will break all my manikins. Stop it!"

But I was too late. Before I reached the window, the toy trolley-car had bowled over one of the little wooden figures— and had smashed both its tiny legs.

"Now see what you've done!" I cried angrily, as the old man picked up the manikin in the palm of his hand. "I must ask you to leave my show-window alone in the future. That's no way to treat toys!"

"They're mine, aren't they?" he demanded innocently. "Didn't I buy your town, with everything in it?"

"No, you didn't," I retorted. "If you think a handful of chocolate creams paid for this artistic miniature of Prestonville, you've got another guess coming."

"Chocolate creams?" said he, with a puckered brow. "Chocolate creams? Did I pay you with chocolate creams?"

"You did!" I answered hotly. "What good are they?"

"Why, chocolate creams are good to eat," he answered solemnly, staring at me like an owl. "You should consider yourself lucky, young man. There are people who would pay more than five thousand dollars for a handful of chocolate creams."

"Nonsense!" I cried, quite out of temper. "If you think—"

But he cut me short with a wave of his hand.

"Now you speak about it," he said blandly, "I *do* remember about the chocolate creams. You must know that it was one of my little jokes. I'm not very intelligent, but I've a keen sense of humor. It happened that there was a young man who got lost in the Maine woods last week. He had five thousand dollars and six chocolate creams in his pocket. For days he wandered about in a circle, till his provisions were all gone. He grew very hungry. The five thousand dollars were no good to him; but the chocolate creams!" The old man broke off to snicker, while his cold, shifty eyes wandered here, there, and everywhere. "Those chocolate creams would have kept life in his bones till his friends found him," he finished with a grin.

"Well?" I demanded.

"Well, sir," he replied, "I took those chocolate creams out of his pocket while he slept, and gave them to you in place of the five thousand dollars. You see, they were very precious chocolate creams— to him. That poor young man died of starvation four days ago. Now doesn't that prove that I have a keen sense of humor, sir?"

It was an extremely warm day; and yet, in spite of the heat, I felt cold. For the first time, Mr. Burton, a real tangible terror of that old man took possession of me. As I have told you, he was not so mad as not to be vicious; and now his white, wrinkled face was convulsed with a malicious merriment. Once more, in my imagination, it had become the mask of flesh which had stared through my show-window— that thin mask without human substance behind it, which might be worn in turn by all evil emotions.

"If you really did such a thing," I said at last, "it shows a strange kind of humor!"

"Strange it may be," he answered sourly, "but it's mine." He drew out his bulging wallet and put five thousand dollars on the counter. "It seems that you were not satisfied with chocolate creams," he added. "Well, there's no suiting everybody. Here's the money. You'd better count it carefully this time, for I've come to carry the toy town away with me."

It is needless to tell you, Mr. Burton, that I acted on his suggestion. I counted the bills three times, and then locked them in my safe. Next, at his bidding, I packed up the toy town in a large leather case and helped him carry it to the door; but here I paused.

"How about the trolley-car?" I asked. "Don't you want that, too?"

"No, young man," he answered, with a solemn shake of his head. "I have no further use for trolley-cars at present. Perhaps some other day. We'll see, we'll see. Meanwhile you can give this one to Charlie, with my compliments. It will make him remember me in the future. A souvenir of our meeting in your shop, eh? Good evening, sir."

Frail as he looked, he picked up the leather case as easily as if it were filled with feathers. Indeed, he was surprisingly strong for a man of his age.

"I find you rather amusing company, young man," were his final words to me. "Drop in some evening at Preston Mansion. You'll always find me at home."

"Whom shall I ask for?" I inquired.

"Mr. Fate," said he, grinning up at me from beneath his ragged hat-brim. "Mr. L. P. D. Fate, at your service."

For some time after he had left me I stood on the door-sill, following his bent, crooked figure with my eyes. Finally it vanished in a crowd that had gathered on the comer of Main Street and Sanford Avenue. Then I heard the

clatter of horses' feet and the brazen clanging of a bell. A moment later the Prestonville ambulance swept past my shop, the horses' shoes striking sparks on the pavement.

"An accident," I thought, not without a sensation of personal fear.

Snatching my hat from the rack, I hurried up the street and was soon in the midst of a horrified group. Not a dozen yards farther on a trolley-car had been deserted by both motorman and conductor, and stood motionless on the tracks. Contrary to the law, the car had no fender.

"Who's been hurt?" I asked an acquaintance who stood on the outskirts of the crowd.

For a moment, Mr. Burton, this man didn't recognize me. When he did, his face took on a frightened look.

"Push your way through, Jim," he told me. "You've got a right to see. It's your nephew, Charlie Carey. He was hit by that trolley. The poor kid! Both his legs are smashed to a pulp."

I waited to hear no more. Pushing my way through the crowd, quite over-mastered by horror and grief, I would have been by Charlie's side in another moment, had not a long, thin hand reached out and plucked me by the sleeve.

"It's Mr. Fate," a low, insinuating voice whispered in my ear. "Mr. L. P. D. Fate, at your service. Don't you forget him, young man. A It doesn't pay to forget Mr. Fate!"

And then I saw that terrible old man at my elbow. There he stood, grinning up at me, his cold gray eyes fixed on my face, his left hand outstretched and holding in its palm a little broken figure of wood.

Suddenly he pocketed his toy and turned away.

"Don't you forget Mr. Fate, young man," he called back over his shoulder. "Home every evening— Preston Mansion— Mr. L. P. D. Fate!"

His voice died away; he was gone. And I? Why, a new horror had overmastered me— a horror of the old man's tangled beard; a horror of his cold, fishy eyes; and, worst of all, a horror of his shriveled, claw-like hands. Yes, I feared his hands the most. What were they not capable of, those hands? Guided by a brain— a little mad, you understand, but not so mad as not to be vicious— surely they gripped the world and spun it at their pleasure. This old man's talons held the throat of strangling humanity in their grasp. Only twice had I seen them at their work, but I wanted no more proof. I was convinced of their power, Mr. Burton!

THE SHOPKEEPER paused to light his cigar, which had gone out. Once again I noticed the uncertainty of his every movement. I had seen drunken men, or men heavy with sleep, fumble with a match before striking it in just such a fashion. Indeed, there was something of the somnambulist about my traveling companion. His acts did not seem to spring from the promptings of his own brain; it was as if he obeyed another's orders. He reminded me forcibly of a famous murderer whom I had interviewed a month before for my paper. Yes, that condemned poisoner had had exactly the same manner— the irresolute gestures, the trick of yawning unexpectedly, the terror and weariness of the eyes.

"I suppose you think me mad?" he said at last.

"Not yet," I answered. "Of course, what you've told me seems unbelievable; but there may be some simple solution to the affair which we've both overlooked."

"No, no!" he cried impatiently. "There isn't any solution. Hear me out, and you'll see that for yourself."

"I'm all attention," I assured him.

YOU CAN well imagine, *he resumed*, that this second tragedy, coming hard on the heels of the first, shattered my peace of mind. From that time on I lived in constant fear of the old man; and yet, much as I feared him, much as I dreaded to see his face or hear his name, he exerted a peculiar fascination over me. Like many another fool, I longed to look into the eyes of the future. Preston Mansion beckoned my imagination.

At first downright fear held this unhealthy curiosity in check; but gradually, as the days went by, the first horror of what I had seen wore off slightly, giving place to a burning desire to probe the mystery. Soon I began to haunt the streets at night.

"YOU VISITED Preston Mansion?" I broke in.

"Yes, frequently. I couldn't stay away, Mr. Burton. Night after night I stole out to the outskirts of town, where that old brick building stood somber and solitary. At first it would seem dark and deserted as I took my stand in the garden among the nodding weeds; but always, after I had been there a short time, one of the windows on the topmost floor would light up on a sudden, and a thin black shadow would pass back and forth across its glowing surface. Often this shadow would pause for an instant and bend down eagerly; and then I knew that something of moment was about to happen in Prestonville. It was terrible to stand there, Mr. Burton, and not know for certain what was happening behind that fire-flecked pane of glass."

"Didn't you ever go inside the house?" I inquired.

"Not until the old man called me. You see, I was afraid."

BUT ONE NIGHT, as I stood in the garden, the front door swung open on its rusty hinges, and I saw him waiting for me in the hall. He held an old-fashioned taper above his head. Its light showed me that he wore a yellow nightcap and a disreputable velvet robe with rents in it."

"Don't be afraid, young man," he called softly. "Come in!"

"I'm not afraid," I replied, stepping forward bravely, although my knees were fairly knocking together from fright. "I'm cold from standing so long in your garden."

"You've been patient, young man," said he. "There's no gainsaying that; but one has to be patient with L. P. D. Fate."

By this time, Mr. Burton, I was standing beside him in the hallway. The mansion was in a pitiable state of neglect. Cobwebs hung in long festoons from the rafters overhead; dust covered the floors and powdered the broad, winding staircase, lying nearly an inch deep on the carved mahogany balustrades; and behind the walls an army of rats scampered back and forth. A dismal odor of damp and decay filled my nostrils.

"The house seems a little old-fashioned, like me," the old man said, giving me a suspicious, sidelong look; "but we're not old-fashioned— neither of us. Ah, no— we keep abreast of the times! Come up to my room, young man."

He led the way up the staircase, while I followed close at his heels. Up and up we went, three flights or more, till we came to the attic. Here he ushered me into a large, bare room, lit dimly by two wax tapers and by the rays of the moon, which peeped in timidly through a hole in the roof; but I had eyes for nothing but the toy town.

There it stood, Mr. Burton, on a large straw mat in the center of the room. Many changes had taken place since I had seen it last— changes, of course, which corresponded with the actual changes in Prestonville. For instance, there was the foundation of my new house standing where there had been but a heap of ashes. Then there was the new public library, which had been built in record time; and, lastly, standing outside my sister's home, was the miniature of the wheel-chair in which poor Charlie managed to get about after his legs had been amputated. These were the details that caught my immediate attention.

"I haven't played very much with this town," the old man said, sitting down on the dusty floor. "Other matters have taken up nearly all my time. There was a steamer to be sunk in the Baltic Sea, an uprising to be arranged in China, some emperor to be assassinated— I can't think of his name now— and a

thousand other amusing things to do. They kept me hopping about, I can tell you! But I mustn't grow lazy. I must amuse you."

"Don't bother about *me*," I said quickly. "I don't need to be amused."

"You are my guest," he said rather sternly, "and I always try to amuse my guests. Now how would a flood suit you, young man? The river seemed very high tonight. Floods are rather commonplace, of course; but still"— he rose and picked up a glass of water which stood on a table within arm's reach— "they're amusing. Don't you think so?" he finished, seating himself in front of the toy town and regarding me with childish solemnity.

"Don't!" I cried in horror, stretching out a detaining hand. "Don't!" And then, seeing that he was tipping the glass in spite of my protests, I shouted: "Floods are old-fashioned! Why, they date back to Noah's ark! Surely you wouldn't be as old-fashioned as that?"

"One grows tired of the new things," he replied, with a sad shake of the head. "I've had enough of trolley-cars and trains and steamers. Come, a flood isn't so bad, young man!"

And then, without another word to say on the matter, he tipped the tumbler more and more till the water spilled out of it in a thin stream and flowed straight toward the miniature town of Prestonville. In a moment more it was dashing down Main Street, sweeping one or two of the cardboard stores with it, and threatening all. Fortunately the glass was only half-full, otherwise the inhabitants might very well have been drowned in their beds.

"Not enough water!" the old man cried peevishly. "Well, that's a disappointment! Better luck next time. I'd go down and fill this tumbler at the pump, if the steps weren't so confoundedly steep. I'm not so spry as I was, young man."

"I'm afraid I've got to be going," I said, glancing up at the moon, which had grown gray and ghostly. "It's morning."

"So it is!" he cried angrily, as if I had insulted him. "It's time you went home. Some guests fairly have to be turned out of doors! Get along now, you humbug, or I'll set my dogs on you!"

"You have dogs?" I cried in surprise, snatching up my hat.

"Hell-hounds," he told me, "that eat sulfur. Get along with you! Come later next time, and don't stay so early. I can't abide guests who think me old-fashioned!"

Well, I hurried out of that house as fast as I could, keeping a wary lookout for any such beasts as he described; but I didn't see any. After a time I came to Main Street, which was a good two feet under water. Here it was that I found Charlie's wheel-chair floating peacefully along on its back; so I pushed it home

ahead of me, to show my wife that I hadn't wasted the whole night. For the rest of that week, we citizens of Prestonville wore rubber boots.

vi

THE SHOPKEEPER broke off and yawned prodigiously. I could see that he would be fast asleep in another moment if I didn't prod him out of it. As you may well guess, I was anxious to hear the rest of his strange story, and I lost no time in keeping him at it.

"Did you go back to Preston Mansion again?" I asked.

"What's that?" said he, coming out of his doze with a start. "I was almost asleep, sir. I've been like that lately. I simply can't keep awake. What were you saying, sir?"

OH, YES, I visited Preston Mansion many times. Indeed, I couldn't seem to keep away from it. That large room on the top floor— that bare, dusty room where the moon peeped in through a hole in the roof— drew me as a magnet draws steel. Night after night I sat on the floor beside the mad old man, and, sitting thus, watched him play with his toys.

It was here that I saw the murder of Molly Adams in miniature— a crime which horrified the entire State. It was in this room that I witnessed the robbing of the Prestonville Bank, when one of the clerks was killed, the burning of the schoolhouse, the explosion at the gas-works, and several other ghastly puppet-shows which froze me with horror. But what could I do, Mr. Burton? I was powerless to turn him from his grim jests. Any word from me only drove him to a more brutal mishandling of his toys.

And yet, in spite of Fate's cruelty, in spite of his wanton destruction of people and objects I held dear, there were times when I pitied him. Boredom sat heavy on his shoulders. You see, Mr. Burton, there was no game under the sun which he hadn't played a million times before. For centuries, no doubt, he had been playing the same savage tricks on his toys. To them, his vagaries were always new; but to him, they were as old as the stars. I knew that he felt the age and mustiness of all he did, and that it filled him with a kind of blind fury against the world. The savor of his brutal jests was gone; nothing remained but the dregs of laughter, which are even more bitter than the dregs of tears. And it was because he knew himself to be a decrepit, toothless tiger, unable to masticate with enjoyment the stale titbits beneath his claws, that he rent so cruelly whatever crossed his path.

"I am not old-fashioned!" he was wont to say over and over again, as if to convince himself rather than me.

Yes, relentless as he was, I often pitied Fate.

"BUT DID he pity you?" I asked.

"No, pity was denied him. He lacked the imagination from which pity springs. I remember that last terrible night we spent together— that night when I knelt on the floor with tears gushing from my eyes.

"'Pretty, pretty!' he gurgled like a baby, touching my cheek with an inquiring forefinger. 'Pretty— like diamonds!'

"You see, he simply didn't know the meaning of tears."

"Tell me about that last night," I said eagerly.

WELL, SIR, it was a beautiful summer evening when I reached Preston Mansion. A full moon rode the heavens, casting its pale, silvery light on the dilapidated old house and the weed-choked garden. Not a breath of wind stirred the languid leaves of the maples. From the broad veranda I could see the roofs of Prestonville, faintly luminous in the distance. Never did the earth feel firmer underfoot; never did the well-being of the town seem so assured.

On this last night, Mr. Burton, I hadn't long to wait. Hardly had I rapped gently on the door before it swung open and my host confronted me.

At the first glance I saw that trouble was brewing. For days he had been sulky and out of sorts, taking no interest in his toys, and sitting silently in a dark comer; but now this sullen brooding had given place to a forced gaiety, which was a sure sign of coming danger. Evidently he was contemplating some new atrocity.

"Come in, young man!" he cried, capering about in his ragged velvet robe like some kind of mad marionette. "I've got a surprise for you. Come in!"

"What is it?" I asked, with the gloomiest apprehensions.

But he gave me no answer— just skipped nimbly up the winding stairway, waving the taper gaily above his head. Soon he had ushered me into that bare attic room where, as I have told you, he kept the toy town spread out in perfect order on a straw mat. The moonlight streamed down upon it through the broken roof.

"I am tired of all these playthings," the old man cried, pointing at the miniature of Prestonville with a wrathful forefinger. "For days they have bored me to distraction. Never have I been so bored since I looked down on Pompeii. Those old Italians! Ah, I served them out for tiring me with their stupid arts and pompous pageantry! It seems only yesterday that I destroyed them and their city, yet it was many centuries ago."

"What are you going to do to Prestonville?" I cried; and all the blood seemed to flow away from my heart, leaving it cold and dead.

For answer he stooped painfully, so that his crooked back curved like a bent bow and his long, tangled beard brushed the floor. Following his every movement with dread and horror, I saw him pick up the corner of the straw mat between finger and thumb.

"What are you going to do to Prestonville?" I repeated dully.

"This, young man," he murmured, shaking the mat very gently. "This!"

You can imagine what happened then, Mr. Burton. No sooner had he taken the comer of that mat between his fingers than I felt the solid floor shake beneath my feet. The whole room swayed dizzily from side to side, and the moon swung back and forth across the opening in the roof like the pendulum of a clock.

"Don't!" I cried, sinking on the floor and covering my eyes. "Don't!"

When I looked again, Mr. Burton, the room was once more stationary; but the toy town of Prestonville? Ah, that had changed in those few brief moments beyond belief! Half the tiny houses were in ruins, and the rest were tottering on their foundations. My new home was still standing, but it was heavily listed to one side.

"Don't!" I cried, holding my clasped hands toward him in entreaty. "Everything that I love is in that town!"

"An earthquake is both unusual and amusing," he murmured, still holding one comer of the mat between finger and thumb. "Don't be selfish, young man. I simply must be amused!"

"I pray you be merciful, Fate!" I cried in a breaking voice.

"Ah, yes!" he broke in hurriedly. "Pray to me! I love to have people pray to me. Some of them have done it so well— Mark Antony, for instance. Let me hear you pray to Mr. Fate, young man!"

And then a strange eloquence was vouchsafed me, Mr. Burton. Words, melodious and rich with feeling, flowed from my lips. It was as if the floodgates of restraint that bottle up a man's emotional outbursts had suddenly opened in my breast. To this day, I don't know what I said, or with what fine poetic imagery I clothed it all; but I do know that it pleased that terrible old man and made him wag his beard at me and smile.

"Very well put!" he cried when I had done. "Mark Antony himself could hardly have improved upon it. You have gifts, young man!"

"I pray you be merciful, Fate!" I repeated.

"Merciful?" he cried irritably, with a sudden change of mood. "Tut, tut, young man! How should I know what mercy is? No one has ever shown me any. Certainly my playthings haven't had mercy on me. No, they have bored me to distraction by their sameness. I can't die, remember, and I've got to live

on endlessly in an immense shop through which millions of toys pass daily. Do you wonder that I destroy them when I find time? Mercy? Tut, young man!"

And then, Mr. Burton, he gave the mat such a savage shake that the walls seemed to change places with one another and the moon spun round and round like a top. When the room finally righted itself again, I saw that my worst fears had been realized. The miniature of Prestonville had been destroyed. Not a house was left standing, with the single exception of Preston Mansion, which was lurching drunkenly to one side. It was as I looked at this desolate waste of ruin which so shortly before had been a thriving town, at my own home toppled over on the sidewalk, that tears rose up into my eyes and fairly blinded me— weak, womanly tears at my own impotency.

"Pretty, pretty!" muttered Fate, touching my wet cheeks with his callous forefinger. "Pretty— like diamonds!"

It was not until many days later that I came to realize that this terrible old man did not know the meaning of tears; that he took delight in them, like a baby, because they were bright and shining. At the time I thought he was mocking me, and I cursed him from my heart. I cursed him, Mr. Burton, as I don't believe any other man has ever cursed Fate. My tongue fairly flamed with invectives. I cursed his cold, fishy eyes, his beard all gritty with bread-crumbs, his vibrating, claw-like hands. I cursed his youth in the days when the world was young, and his old age when the world would be dying. I cursed him by all his names together— Luck, Providence, Destiny, Fate— and by each one singly. And when I had done, Mr. Burton, when my throat had gone dry of words, I found him grinning.

"Well done, young man!" he said, with his head on one side. "You curse even better than you pray. I can't think of anybody who has so spoken up to me since Judas Iscariot on the day when he hanged himself. He had a scorpion for a tongue, did Judas! You did very creditably, young man. You actually succeeded in amusing me. I feel that I should reward you. What would you have of me, young man?"

"Nothing!" I cried, half out of my mind from grief. "Treat me as you do the rest of mankind— carry me around in your pocket."

"Not a bad idea!" said he, once more bending his crooked back over the ruins of the town. "So that's what you want, is it?"

"I want nothing from you," I told him coldly.

He paid me no heed— just began to grope about with his long, thin fingers in the only toy house that still was standing. At last, with a shrill, neighing laugh, he pulled through one of the open windows a tiny wooden figure and held it toward me in the palm of his hand.

"Here you are!" said he. "You came out of this business without a scratch. So you want to go into old Fate's pocket, do you? Well, l must warn you that it's dark in there. Your ambition may fall asleep."

"Ambition?" I cried in despair. "My ambition is buried under this town!"

"Very well," said he, cocking his beard at me whimsically. "You're safe in my pocket— at least, for a time." He paused and regarded me steadily with his cold gray eyes. "I'm essentially honest," he continued, "and so I'm going to warn you again. What goes into my pocket must sooner or later come out. Good-bye until then, young man!"

THE SHOPKEEPER again yawned, and his chin sank down on his breast. Evidently he was on the very brink of sleep; but I had no intention of letting him doze off until he had told me the rest of his story. I bent forward and touched him on the arm.

"And then what happened?" I asked.

"Why, then he slipped the little wooden figure into his pocket and went out through the open door. I've never seen him again since that night, Mr. Burton."

"But what did *you* do?"

"I knelt on the dusty floor of that attic for a long, long time, quite alone with the ruins of my toy town. Nothing seemed to matter very much any more, Mr. Burton. It was as if I had been suddenly plucked out of life, as if its happiness and suffering were as remote as the stars. Later, even the real town of Prestonville failed to move me— that tragic heap of shattered masonry beneath the paling moon. Everything had died in my breast but fear— fear of the mental darkness which now enshrouded me, fear of that terrible old man whom I could no longer see, fear of that future time when Fate would drag me out of his pocket into the light of ea relentless day. And so I have lived ever since— without love or ambition or hope. Only fear has remained, Mr. Burton!"

vii

ONCE MORE the shopkeeper's chin sank on his breast and his brown eyes closed.

"I'm so tired!" I heard him mutter fretfully.

A moment later he was fast asleep; and this time I did not disturb him. Instead, I stared through the window at the level swamp-land through which the train was speeding to make up for lost time.

"A strange story to come from even a madman!" I told myself.

Far ahead, around a distant bend, I saw a glow in the murky sky which informed me that I should soon reach my destination. A few minutes more and the train would pull into Fairview. The light came from a factory on the brow of the hill above the town.

Turning from the window, I started picking up my belongings. Suddenly I saw something which caused a cold thrill to run up my spine. While I had been staring out at the landscape, an old man had noiselessly entered the smoking-compartment. He now sat beside the sleeping shopkeeper, peering into a large cardboard box that rested on his bony knees. I noticed, with an involuntary shudder, that this old man's long, tangled beard was sprinkled with bread-crumbs, which dangled from it like berries in a bush.

"What have you got there?" I asked, for I felt the need of speech.

"Toys," he said with a snicker. "Do you want to see them?"

Not waiting for my response, he put his hand into the box and pulled out a toy train. Next he drew forth a coil of tin tracks, and placed them on the floor.

"Do you want to see it work?" he asked, winding the engine as he spoke. "I love toy trains! Don't you?"

"Yes, of course," I answered, glancing hastily at the shopkeeper, who was still sleeping peacefully; "but I'm leaving at the next station, and I'm afraid I won't have time to see it work."

"Yes, you will, young man!" he cried excitedly. "Oh, yes, you will, I'm going to start it now!"

In spite of my common sense, I felt a sudden flicker of fear as he got painfully down on his hands and knees and placed the toy train on the tracks. A moment later it started off. Faster and faster it went, while the old man's tangled beard waved joyously above it.

"It's going to smash!" I heard him mutter in a strange, singsong voice. "It's going to smash!"

But it didn't— not that time, at least. Slowing down at the last vicious curve, even as the train which carried us was doing now, it came to a shivering halt. Before it had fairly stopped, the old man seized the engine and began winding it savagely. Then, glancing slyly at the sleeping shopkeeper, he felt in his pocket and pulled out a little wooden figure. This he carefully inserted through a window of the first toy car, and replaced the engine on the tracks.

By now we had reached Fairview. Pushing past the old man, It was hurrying out of the smoking-compartment, when something prompted me to glance back over my shoulder.

There the shopkeeper sat, sleeping sonorously, and quite unaware of the old man who crouched beside him on the floor— that mad old man who, even

as I watched, took a match out of his pocket and laid it carefully across the toy tracks.

"It's going to smash!" I heard him mutter gleefully through his beard. "It's going to smash!"

viii

I HAVE little more to add. All of you, no doubt, still remember the glaring headlines in the morning papers, telling of the most disastrous railroad wreck that this country had ever known— how that ill-fated train, while making up time between Fairview and Forest Point, was derailed by a tree-trunk which had fallen across the tracks, and pitched over a hundred-foot embankment; and how every man, woman, and child aboard met an almost instantaneous death. All that is ancient history now.

But the mad old man— what of him? He was not among the charred bodies taken from the burning train; nor was he among the few men who leaped for their lives and perished on the cruel rocks that lined the gully. No, he and his toys had vanished together.

Of late I have been thinking that perhaps that unfortunate shopkeeper was not so mad; that Fate may indeed wear a human guise while he stalks among us. If this is so, surely it was he whom I met that night as the train drew into Fairview! Fate, an old man playing with toys like a child of ten— a mad old man who is not so mad as not to be vicious! Truly a terrible thought!

But there is another thought, more terrible still, which of late has plagued me sorely. How was it that I came to escape that night? Yet did I actually escape? Perhaps, after all, I have not slipped through those eager, groping fingers— perhaps that merciless old man has merely dropped me into a ragged pocket, to play with me at his leisure. Yes, I feel that he can still hold me at will in the hollow of his hand.

Long ago, like the shopkeeper, I lost love and hope and ambition. Now, of all human emotions, only fear remains— the fear of a rat in a trap when it hears its jailer's footsteps approaching— the fear of a fly in the threatening shadow of a descending hand.

And yet, as I draw back with a shudder, as I look about hopelessly for some means of escape, a merciful drowsiness descends upon me, calming the wild, tumultuous beating of my heart. Yes, all my senses are engulfed in a sea of tranquil dreams. Yawning, I stretch my arms above my head and yawn again. Surely this must mean the beginning of the end. I, too, am in Fate's pocket!

———————

13: A Rogue and an Innocent

Vernon Ralston

fl 1907-1921

Bathurst Times (NSW) 23 Aug 1913

MR. AUSTIN CLIFFORD paused before crossing the road to his flat, and road with, deep interest the newspaper placards—

'Jewellery Robbery at West End Hotel—
Supposed International Gang At Work.'

'Dear me!' thougtht Mr. Clifford, 'what wouldn't some of our politicians give to attain the celebrity my little efforts achieve?'

As he waited to cross he had the uneasy sensation that he was being watched. Somehow he was conscious that hostile eyes were upon him. A half-glance round gave him a distinct thrill; he saw that the nignt-porter of the St. James's Hotel in, the company of two undeniable plain clothes officers.

Like a flash the awkwardness of his position came to him. His money and the stolen banknotes and jewellery were in his flat. He had barely five pounds in his possession. That was obviously not enough to enable him to defy the efforts of the British police. He must go to his flat, and yet he felt certain that the detectives would follow him. Still the risk had to be run, and with an agility remarkable in such a portly, elderly gentleman, he swerved through the crowd of motor-buses and taxis and reached the entrance of his flat.

He promptly hailed the lift man.

'James,' he said, 'there are some solicitors' clerks trying to serve me with a writ. I want to dodge them. Here's a sovereign for you. If they ask for a gentleman like me take them up to the top floor. Mr. Akroyd's flat is empty, and it will do them good to knock at the door for half an hour.'

'Right, sir, thank you, sir,' said the gratified James. 'I'll do 'em.'

Mr. Clifford left the lift at the third floor and darted into his rooms. He snatched up a bag he always kept ready packed for emergencies, took his money and the stolen jewellery and notes from their hiding-place, and in two minutes was descending the emergency staircase at the back. As he went down he heard the whir of the lift as it rose to the top floor and smiled.

He slipped quietly out of the buildings, passed along a side-street, hailed a taxi, and said: 'Euston' to the driver.

'A near shave,' thought Mr. Clifford. 'I'll book for Crewe. A good junction like that always puzzles the police.'

He felt distinctly happy as the whirled along the streets. The police were quite welcome to all they could find in his flat now. He had rented the flat

furnished, and being, in consequence of his profession, a wanderer, had few personal belongings. Then, in addition, he had the excellent habit of always burning letters and papers.

'They'll smell round the top flat for half an hour,' thought Mr. Clifford, 'and then—'

A violent shock checked his meditations. The taxi had collided with a van. Mr Clifford was thrown violently forward and stunned. Before he had quite recovered consciousness two men were fighting for the privilege of administering first aid to him— whilst a shrill voice hopelessly at the back of the crowd cried, 'I'm a medical man. Let me come.'

'I'm all right, thank you,' remarked Mr. Clifford, fearing lest the first-aiders should pull him asunder in their rivalry.

'Let's see if there are any bones broken,' began one of these philanthropists. A benevolent gentleman, who evidently, from his appearance, believed in alcohol as a cure-all, forced his way through the crowd.

' 'Ere, drink that,' he said, emptying a quantity of the very worst brandy on to Mr. Clifford's shirtfront. With difficulty Mr. Clifford extricated himself from the hands of his wellwishers.

'Will someone call me another taxi?' he asked. 'I have a train to catch.'

'You'll please wait a minute, sir?', said a policeman with a notebook.

'I was inside the cab. I saw nothing of the accident,' explained Mr. Clifford.

'That don't matter, sir. There may be claims for damages or what not,' replied the policeman.

So Mr. Clifford had to wait whilst the policeman took down the van man's name and address, and the taxi-driver's name and address, and examined the latter's licence and noted the damage, to the vc-' hides. Then he solemnly noted the name and address with which Mr. Clifford supplied him, and the latter gentleman was at liberty to go. By the time he got away he had wasted half an hour, and then it was a few minutes before he could find a disengaged taxi.

He reached Euston safely, and took his bag himself into the station to avoid the observation of porters. He found that a train was leaving for Crewe in a quarter of an hour, and promptly booked his ticket. He glanced at his silk hat and saw that it had been sadly ruffled by the collision. He felt his shirt still damp and discolored by the benevolent gentleman's brandy.

'I must look a sight,' thought Mr. Clifford, who was faddy about his personal appearance, 'but I've no time to get my hat ironed here. I must try and make myself look a bit decent in the train.'

He stood by the side of the bookstall, out of the observation of the passengers, apparently deeply occupied in examining the fiction successes of

last season now on sale at greatly reduced prices. Yet at the same time he kept an exceedingly careful eye on the platform.

All at once he groaned inwardly. Coming on to the platform,' he saw the two detectives and the night-porter of the St. James's Hotel.

'Good heavens! they've found I've bolted,' he thought. 'Whatever brings them here? Oh, I forgot that it was the Liverpool train. The very train they might suspect that I should try and leave London by. That kind of forgetfulness generally results, in five years' penal servitude.'

He slid into a waiting-room, pulled his hat over his eyes, and pretended to be asleep.

'They may look through the waiting rooms or they may not. There's a distinct chance for me. But they're bound to look through the train when it comes in. I can't go past them to leave the platform, and there's no other exit. It all depends whether they are shrewd enough to think that I might have sighted them and taken refuge here.'

He had not been in the room more than a minute when a woman entered with a year old baby. She looked long and curiously at Mr. Clifford as he shammed sleep in a corner.

'Confound it, they're not having women detectives!' reflected the angry gentleman. 'No, they'd never handicap them with babies.'

The woman continued to stare at Mr. Clifford. Apparently he still slept steadily. She fixed the baby comfortably on the form, and put a cake of chocolate in its hand. The child gurgled with delight. Then, still watching Mr. Clifford, she stole on tiptoe from the room.

'Hang it!' thought Mr. Clifford, 'the heartless beast has deserted her baby. Now the young demon will start squalling, and everyone's attention will be drawn to this waiting-room. If only I could muzzle it!'

He glanced out of the waiting-room door. The train had come in, and the detectives were scrutinising the passengers. One of them, after a minute, walked across the platform and began to look through the waiting-rooms.

'I'm done,' thought Mr. Clifford. 'Well, well! they'll send me to Parkhurst because I'm old and fat. I wonder what my prison reminiscences, will sell for when I got out. Wish I could run for it, but sixty years and sixteen stone are top much of a handicap.'

Just then the baby waved its arms at him, and Mr. Clifford saw a way out. He slipped across the room and grabbed the baby. Instantly the friendly child dabbed wet chocolate over his face and collar. Mr. Clifford felt infinitely disreputable and infinitely happy. Holding the baby in lopsided fashion with one hand, and, gripping his bag with the other, he stepped boldly and openly on to the plafonn. With his ruffled top hat, his brandy-stained shirt, his face

and collar decorated with chocolate ornamentations, he felt that he was disguised. The hall-porter had only seen him in the perfect dress Mr. Clifford always assumed when working a high-class hotel. He saw one of the waiters and hailed him boldly in front of the detective and the hall-porter.

'Look 'ere, young feller,' said Mr. Clifford fiercely, 'can you get 'ot milk for kids on this train, or can you not?'

'Yes,' said the waiter curtly. Mr. Clifford, looking like the most dejected old grandfather imaginable, put down his bag and strove to open a carriage door

'Let me do it, Pa,' said one of the detectives amiably.

'Thanks, young feller; I'm not used to travelling with kids.'

The baby continued to slobber over Mr. Clifford. His collar was a thing to be sorrowful for.

Mr. Clifford placed his bag on the rack, and kept the baby on his knee. He clung to that clammy, dirty infant as if it were found gold.

The two detectives talked outside, keeping a keen eye on the late passengers who were rushing up for the train.

'Gee-gee,' said the baby, dancing on Mr. Clifford's knee. Mr. Clifford gave the child rides until he was breathless. He was greatly relieved to hear the whistle blow.

Then one of the detectives said to the other, 'Well, I shall be at Liverpool. There are three steamers leaving this week-end.'

Mr. Clifford caught the words 'Southampton' and 'Harwich,' but nothing more of their conversation. To his infinite horror as the train began to move the detective opened the door and stepped into his carriage.

Under cover of dancing the baby Mr. Clifford removed from his hand a costly ring which might have excited suspicion.

'Fine child,' said the detective, seating himself opposite Mr. Clifford, and watching amusedly his efforts to pacify the baby.

'Aye,' responded Mr. Clifford, 'I wish someone else 'ad it to look after.'

'It looks a healthy boy,' remarked tho detective.

'He is that,' replied Mr. Clifford, greatly relieved to find that the detective had settled the question of the infant's sex for him.

'You're not used to looking after 'em, I can see,' continued the detective humorously.

'Not me,' replied Mr. Clifford. 'It's thirty years since I handled a' kid— this one's mother. My missus had brought it down to stay with us a bit. I never minded that. But then my missus gets bronchitis and asthma, and what not, and can't take the kid back to its 'ome again. So it's shoved on pore ole grandpa to go to Crewe with 'im. I 'ope I don't throw it out of the winder before I gets there. It's no job for an ole feller like me.'

'I've one just that age,' said the detective proudly. 'Youngest of five. Regular young terror. There's no telling what he'll do next. Now if I was you I'd let it crawl round the carriage a bit. It can't get much dirtier, and everyone expects kids to be as black as coal on a journey.'

'Aye, it's no good my tiring myself out. Look what he's done for me. I just went into the refreshment room to 'ave a drop of brandy to pick me, up for the train, and the young beggar empties it down my shirt. And my top 'at, he's spoilt it something shameful. Generally, I keeps it for funerals, but the missus said I'd got to wear it to-day to look respectable travelling.'

'What d'ye call him?' inquired the detective.

'George,' returned Mr: Clifford, 'By rights they should have called him William after me, but my daughter said 'er first must be called after 'er 'usband. You'd' think a girl'd make a bit 'more of 'er own father, wouldn't you.'

'Come here, George,' said the detective; 'now let me show you the puff-puffs out of the window.'

Mr. Clifford beamed on his enemy. That he should have the wretched baby taken off his hands was good luck, but that the detective should nurse it was something immense.

'Where are you going?' inquired Mr. Clifford, thinking it tactful to display a decent interest in his fellow passenger's movements.

'Liverpool,' replied the detective. 'I've a bit of, business there for a day or two.'

'I don't know much of Liverpool,' admitted Mr. Clifford. 'Just passed through it once when I took the missus to the Isle of Man, but it struck me as a tidy place. And what might your business be?'

The detective politcly and discreetly, if untruthfully, answered that he was a traveller in hardware.

'Ah, it's a good line, I believe,' replied Mr. Clifton. 'But I should think that there's a lot of competition in it nowadays. There is in most things. I always tell the missus it's lucky we sold our greengrocery business and retired in time.'

'You have a nap, pa,' said the detective kindly. 'You look done up. I'll take charge of his lordship for half an hour.'

'Thank you, kindly,' beamed Mr. Clifford. 'What with one thing and another, the rushing for the train and the forgetting tho kid's food, I don't know whether I'm on my 'ead or my 'eels today.'

Mr. Clifford slept not. Though eyelids apaprently closed he watched the detective's struggles with the baby. When he pretended to wake he consulted the detective on the feeding of infants, and they agreed that hot milk and biscuits would serve. Gradually the hours of the journey passed away, and Mr.

Clifford confided to his detective friend as they ran into Crewe that he had never been so glad to see a railway station.

'I quite understand,' said the detective— though he didn't.

'Now,' said Mr. Clifford, 'you've been very decent to me, young feller. If you like to look in at 14 Abney Terrace, Hammersmith, any time, you'll 'ave a drop of of Scotch and a welcome. Thanks for your 'elp. If it hadn't been for you, grandfather or no' grandfather. I'd 'ave dropped that kid out of the winder.'

The train moved away, and Mr. Clifford was left standing on Crewe platform with a baby. By the infinite mercy of Providence the baby was asleep.

For one moment he thought of leaving the baby in the waiting-room. It seemed to be the general custom. But then he reflected that thte child would certainly be sent to the work house. It scarcely seemed a sporting return when the child had saved him from a prison.

So he left his bag at the cloak-room, took an envelope from his pocket, and setting the sleeping, child down on a bench scribbled a few lines. Then he took up his burden and walked out of the station. For half an hour he strolled till he came across a church. It was now dusk, and he stopped the first errand-boy he saw.

'Where's the Vicarage?' demanded Mr. Clifford. The boy instantly pointed to a house. Mr. Clifford stole up the garden path and laid the sleeping child at the door. Then he took up the envelope, on which he had written, 'An anguished mother beseeches you to send this child to a good orphanage,' slipped five ten-pound notes into it, and pinned it to the baby's dress. He rang the bell and vanished into the darkness.

Very quietly he strolled back into the town, and had a shave, and a wash at a barber's. Then he reclaimed his bag at the station and quietly booked for Buxton. He thought a few weeks at a quiet hydro would suit him till the fuss was over, and he could get away abroad comfortably with the jewels.

He smiled as he read in the newspaper about the extraordinary desertion of a child at Crewe. He smiled still more a few days later when he saw it announced that the notes left with the child were, part of the proceeds of the St. James's Hotel, robbery.

'Ah,' thought Mr. Clifford, 'that detective will guess something now, and when he thinks how he dandled that kid on his knee I'll wager he wishes that he'd never been born.'

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14: The Cabinet Secret

J. S. Fletcher

1863-1935

In: *The Massingham Butterfly*, *and other Stories*, 1926

WHEN MISS MATILDA GRINDLE and Mr. George Pegge had reached the top of the hill and arrived at the seat on which its donor had insisted on painting the legend "Rest and Be Thankful," in large white letters, they sat down without any particular thoughts of either gratitude or recuperation, and Mr. Pegge began to make holes in the turf with the ferrule of his eighteenpenny walking stick, while Miss Grindle contemplated the glories of Slominster, lying in the valley beneath. There was silence between them for a full minute, and then Miss Grindle coughed in a fashion peculiar to people who are about to air their sentiments.

"You forget, George," she said: "you forget that every knight must win his spurs. If you'd read as much history as I did at the high school you'd remember that they all did that. Some fought lions. Some went in search of the— the paynim. Some went to vanquish the Turks. Some— but the principle is there, George. And so I don't think I'm exacting when I tell you that before I can finally and definitely name the day for our— our espousals, George, I must ask you to render some really signal service to the cause which I have so much at heart, and to which I have for one year and three months rendered secretarial duties— honorary, of course."

Mr. Pegge heaved a deep sigh and looked thoughtfully at the deep bands of red and yellow which the departed sun had left behind him over Slominster. He punched more holes in the turf.

"It's all very well, is that, Matilda," said Mr. Pegge. "All very well— especially that part about the chaps of the olden times. But I can't go about in a suit of armour, sticking a lance into all and sundry. Ain't I done a good deal for the cause, as it is? You've never found me behindhand when it came to being steward at meetings and distributing handbills at the doors. And I twice walked in the male supporters' section in big processions. Didn't I—?"

"I know you've been very tractable indeed, George, and I've no fault to find with you," said Miss Grindle. "In time I believe you'll make a very valuable male supporter. But, before I bestow my hand on you— with, of course, my heart, George— I want you to achieve some great deed, some glorious deed, that will make me feel you are really worthy of me! You must remember, George, that I have achieved! There have been two occasions on which I should have repaired to a martyr's cell if some officious person had not paid the fine."

Mr. Pegge sniffed.

"What might you be wanting me to do, Matilda?" he asked anxiously. "You know how things are with me? As soon as ever you say the word, I'll take the house and order the furniture. It'll be the better for my business to be married. A married man—"

"I cannot discuss marriage from the common point of view, George," observed Miss Grindle. "My conception runs upon a higher plane. You must rise to them. And, as to what I want you to do— well, I want you to prove your nerve, your initiative, your resourcefulness, your bravery—"

"Biggish order," said Mr. Pegge doubtfully. "However, I dare say I've as good a stock of those as most chaps. You've got some notion in your head, Matilda?"

Miss Grindle trifled with the enamel badge which hung round her throat. She smiled graciously, after the fashion of old-time ladies who dispatched knights to the arena.

"Well, George, I have a notion," she confessed, "and it is one which, if carried out, will cover you with glory. Next week, George, you are going to Sandle Bay for a brief holiday— ten days, I think?"

"All I can spare just now," said Mr. Pegge. "Especially if we are to be married in the au—"

"We are not talking of marriage, George," said Miss Grindle. "Let us keep to the point. You are going to Sandle Bay next week. So is Mr. Trent-Palethorpe."

Mr. Pegge leaped in his seat.

"What, the Cabinet minister?" he exclaimed.

"The Cabinet minister, Secretary of State for the major colonies, member for the Slominster division— and our bitterest opponent," said Miss Grindle. "Yes."

Mr. Pegge smote his straw hat violently, flourished stick and groaned.

"Matilda!" he exclaimed. "Don't! I don't know what it is, but I daren't do it! I know what it would mean. Oh yes, don't I just? And, Matilda, just think of me, a young man, starting out in life, having my name in the papers! Of course, I should pay the fine, but, even the— oh, no, Matilda, I couldn't really, whatever it may be. I am willing to process again with the Male Supporters—I'll even promise to make a try at a speech, but don't ask me, Matilda; don't ask me!"

Miss Grindle rose and, shaking out her skirts, extended a cool hand.

"Then farewell, George," she said calmly. "Here, where first we plighted our troth— conditionally, George— we will release each other. There is no badge of servitude to return; no mark of bondage, even if it were splendid in rubies and diamonds. Good-bye, George Pegge."

Mr. Pegge looked at the extended hand as if he were doubtful what to do with it. He began to mouth the carved head of his walking stick.

"I expect I shall have to do it!" he said, not too graciously. "And, dash it, if I say I'll do it, I will do it! Now then, Matilda, what is it? Give it a name," continued Mr. Pegge, unconsciously dropping into familiar phraseology— "Give it a name and if I don't do it, I'll— I'll die in the attempt!"

Miss Grindle resumed her seat.

"I knew your soul would respond to the trumpet-call of duty and honour, when you had reflected, George," she said. "I don't respect you any the less for your momentary faint-heartedness. The bravest of us— I myself— know what it is to quake when the breach lies wide before us! But when the bugle sounds, George—"

"So long as there's the option of a fine—" muttered Mr. Pegge. "Yes, Matilda, and what is it?"

"Merely this, George. There is a certain document which our branch is determined shall be served on Mr. Trent-Palethorpe personally. So far, every attempt to hand it to him has failed. George, that document I shall hand to you!" said Miss Grindle with stern resolution. "You will devise some means of handing it to him; you will give me your word that you have done so, and my hand— accompanied by my heart— is yours!"

Mr. Pegge rubbed the point of his chin.

"But Matilda, how on earth am I to get near a nob like Trent-Palethorpe?" he demanded. "You know what those chaps are! And I know for a fact that he's always accompanied by a couple of detectives. Of course, I know he's going to Sandle Bay to play golf; but the 'tec'll dog every yard he walks, and if I tried even to get a word in with him, they'd run me in. Ain't you got an idea to give away on the point, Matilda? Can't you suggest something?"

Miss Grindle rose, shaking her head.

"No, George. You must do the deed all out of your own initiative," she answered. "I want to prove you, George. The document shall be handed to you on the eve of your departure. Then you will gird on your sword and go forth to battle, to come home victorious or defeated. Let us go, George. I think the grass is getting damp."

It was characteristic of Miss Grindle that, when she had got through with business or conversation connected with the Cause, she was amenable, pleasant, and even sentimental in several other ways; and Mr. Pegge's homeward walk was accordingly made sweet by various little proofs on the part of his companion that she was, after all, a woman. He retired to bed in a state of profound reflection upon feminine complexity.

"But Matilda's all right," he said to himself. "We ain't none of us perfect— not even them as thinks they are. Matilda's got her fads, same as we all have.

But she's flesh and blood, is Matilda, when all's said and done. Wish I could think of a way to plant the blooming paper on Trent-Palethorpe!"

But when Mr. Pegge arrived at Sandle Bay, and had taken time to look around him, he found that his anticipation as regards all approach to Mr. Trent-Palethorpe was only too likely to be realised. The secretary for the major colonies was there, it is true, and he was playing golf all day, and every day, and anybody who chose might see him on the links, and follow his round; but as to getting a word in private with him—

"Might as well try to send a love-letter to the Pope of Rome!" soliloquised Mr. Pegge, when several days had gone by, and he was no nearer the attainment of his wishes. "This is a nice way of spending a bit of a holiday!"

Various notions suggested themselves to Mr. Pegge's brain in the privacy of his lodgings. He would pay a day's or a week's subscription to the Golf Club, dress himself up, affect the heavy swell, and hang about the clubroom on the chance of being spoken to by the great man. But he admitted sorrowfully that he had not the manner, nor the appearance. Very well, supposing he shaved off his moustache, smudged his face, borrowed and donned some ancient garments, and went as a caddie! No, that wouldn't do. The regular caddies would find out. Besides, he didn't know a cleek from a cricket bat. But what was he to do? He was losing his sleep, his appetite, his bright eyes. And yet—he knew Matilda, and something had got to be done.

It was not until the evening of his very last day at Sandle Bay that Mr. Pegge got his inspiration. When it came it threw him into a violent perspiration, it was so daring— so— so brilliant. He was pale with emotion as he sat down, determined, resolute, to act upon it then and there. Either it would carry him to victory or he would sink to defeat.

Mr. Pegge wrote a letter to Mr. Trent-Palethorpe, in which he told that right honourable gentleman the plain truth!

It occupied Mr. Pegge one-half of the night to write that letter. He reminded Mr. Trent-Palethorpe that he, George Pegge, was one of his, Mr. Trent-Palethorpe's, constituents, and a young and hopeful tradesman of Slominster. He spoke of the associations of the Pegge family with Slominster for several generations. He assured the minister of his honesty of purpose. And he poured out his soul in ink, and wound up by throwing himself upon the great man's honour and mercy and charity.

NEXT MORNING Mr. Pegge carried his letter to the hotel which harboured Mr. Trent-Palethorpe and delivered it to one who promised to hand it to the addressee at once. Mr. Pegge went outside and sat down on a bench, trembling violently. He passed into a state of something very like coma, and he

almost fell off the bench when, half an hour later, a waiter from the hotel tapped him on the shoulder.

"Name of Pegge?"

"My name," murmured Miss Grindle's emissary, feeling that the crucial moment had come.

"Mr. Trent-Palethorpe wants to see you. This way!"

Mr. Pegge presently found himself ushered into a private sitting-room, wherein the cabinet minister sat at breakfast. He bowed profoundly, and Mr. Trent-Palethorpe gave him a cheery nod, and then looked at him with critical and intense interest, as he pointed him to a chair.

"Oh," he said, "so you're Mr. George Pegge?"

"I am, sir," replied Mr. Pegge.

"And you think that Miss Grindle really will marry you if I consent to receive the precious document from you?" asked Mr. Trent-Palethorpe.

"Oh yes, indeed, sir!" said Mr. Pegge. "Miss Grindle is a man— I mean a woman of her word."

The Cabinet Minister gazed again at Mr. Pegge and then at Mr. Pegge's letter, which lay on the toast rack.

"By the by," he said, "what— er— what sort of lady is Miss Grindle?"

Mr. Pegge brightened up. Things were not half so formidable as he had feared. He smiled.

"Matilda, sir?" he said. "Well, of course, Matilda's on what you might call the small side."

"Dear me! Is she— er— agreeable, pretty?"

Mr. Pegge sniffed and looked at a corner of the ceiling.

"Matilda's held to be one of the prettiest girls in our town, sir," he said. "What you term a blonde, sir, with blue eyes. And as to what you call agreeableness, sir— well, when Matilda isn't on the ramp, nobody could be nicer."

"And how often is she not on the ramp?" inquired Mr. Trent-Palethorpe. "For, from my epistolary acquaintance with Miss Grindle I have come to regard her as a perfect Amazon, breathing forth fire and destruction, and—"

"Oh, don't you believe it, sir!" said Mr. Pegge. "Matilda's awful when she's on a platform, but that isn't what Matilda is when she ain't busy with the Cause. Now, if you'll permit me, sir, this is Matilda's photo."

And Mr. Pegge, from a brand new pocket-book drew forth a carte-de-visite and passed it over with a low bow. And Mr. Trent-Palethorpe took it and gazed at it with feelings of profound astonishment. Could it be possible that this was the Matilda who bombarded him with letters in which—

"God bless my soul!" he exclaimed.

He handed the photo back, and again stared at Mr. Pegge with critical interest.

"I say, my friend," he said, "aren't you— aren't you a bit afraid of marrying this young lady?"

Mr. Pegge's light blue eyes became childlike in their roundness.

"What, me!" he said. "Oh no, sir! Me and Matilda understands each other. Of course, when Matilda's on the ramp— well, it is a leetle disconcerting, so to speak. But when she ain't— well, then, sir, Matilda's as reasonable as other young ladies, although she is a bit— well, high-flown in her emotions."

"I see, I see," said Mr. Trent-Palethorpe, rubbing his chin. "I quite see. And when Miss Grindle has become Mrs. Pegge, is she— er— is she going to continue her devotion to the cause?"

Mr. Pegge drew himself up, and the great man, watching him carefully, saw a certain something steal into his eyes.

"When Miss Grindle is Mrs. Pegge, sir," replied Mr. Pegge, "which is to say a wife— and if one may speak of such matters— a mother— she will have other things to think of than Causes. Yes, sir!"

Mr. Trent-Palethorpe held out his hand.

"Well, where's the precious document?" he said. "Oh, that's it! Very well, Mr. Pegge; it shall have consideration. Now you can truthfully tell Miss Grindle that you've won your spurs. And— er— Mr. Pegge, wait a moment."

Mr. Pegge, who was always of a nature obedient to forces which he recognised as being superior to his own, resumed the chair from which he had risen. Mr. Trent-Palethorpe left his breakfast and went over to a side table. He produced from his breast pocket a cheque book, and, tearing out a leaf of its contents, scribbled upon it. Then he folded the leaf in three, and, placing it in an envelope, handed the envelope to his visitor, who stared at him in surprise.

"I should like to offer you a little wedding present, Mr. Pegge," he said. "It may— er— come in handy when Mrs. Pegge has other cares than those of the— shall we say, Cause. And I wish you good luck."

Then Mr. Pegge went out, and elbowed in the doorway a gentleman who was lounging in, to whom, when he had entered, the Cabinet minister turned with a smile.

"See that little chap going out, Pembury?" he said.

"I did," answered Mr. Pembury. "What of him?"

"What of him?" exclaimed Mr. Trent-Palethorpe. "That's the bravest man alive."

If you live in New York and use the subway a lot, and you are an imaginative writer, well then... Two weird subway tales by Malcolm Jameson

15: Train For Flushing

Malcolm Jameson

1891-1945

Weird Tales, March 1940

"THEY ought never to have hired that man. Even the most stupid of personnel managers should have seen at a glance that he was mad. Perhaps it is too much to expect such efficiency these days— in *my* time a thing like this could not have happened. They would have known the fellow was under a curse! It only shows what the world has come to. But I can tell you that if we ever get off this crazy runaway car, I intend to turn the Interboro wrong-side out. They needn't think because I am an old man and retired that I am a nobody they can push around. My son Henry, the lawyer one, will build a fire under them— he knows people in this town.

"And I am not the only victim of the maniac. There is a pleasant, elderly woman here in the car with me. She was much frightened at first, but she had recognized me for a solid man, and now she stays close to me all the time. She is a Mrs. Herrick, and a quite nice woman. It was her idea that I write this down— it will help us refresh our memories when we come to testify.

"Just at the moment, we are speeding atrociously *downtown* along the Seventh Avenue line of the subway— but we are on the *uptown* express track! The first few times we tore through those other trains it was terrible— I thought we were sure to be killed— and even if we were not, I have to think of my heart. Dr. Steinback told me only last week how careful I should be. Mrs. Herrick has been very brave about it, but it is a scandalous thing to subject anyone to, above all such a kindly little person.

"The madman who seems to be directing us (if charging wildly up and down these tracks implies *direction*), is now looking out the front door, staring horribly at the gloom rushing at us. He is a big man and heavy-set, very weathered and tough-looking. I am nearing eighty and slight.

"There is nothing I can do but wait for the final crash; for crash we must, sooner or later, unless some Interboro official has brains enough to shut off the current to stop us. If *he* escapes the crash, the police will know him by his heavy red beard and tattooing on the backs of his hands. The beard is square-cut and there cannot be another one like it in all New York.

"But I notice I have failed to put down how this insane ride began. My granddaughter, Mrs. Charles L. Terneck, wanted me to see the World's Fair, and was to come in from Great Neck and meet me at the subway station. I will

say that she insisted someone come with me, but I can take care of myself— I always have— even if my eyes and ears are not what they used to be.

The train was crowded, but somebody gave me a seat in a corner. Just before we reached the stop, the woman next to me, this Mrs. Herrick, had asked if I knew how to get to Whitestone from Flushing. It was while I was telling her what I knew about the busses, that the train stopped and let everybody off the car but us. I was somewhat irritated at missing the station, but knew that all I had to do was stay on the car, go to Flushing and return. It was then that the maniac guard came in and behaved so queerly.

"This car was the last one in the train, and the guard had been standing where he belongs, on the platform. But he came into the car, walking with a curious rolling walk (but I do not mean to imply he was drunk, for I do not think so) and his manner was what you might call masterful, almost overbearing. He stopped at the middle door and looked very intensely out to the north, at the sound.

" '*That* is not the Scheldt!' he called out, angrily, with a thick, foreign accent, and then he said 'Bah!' loudly, in a tone of disgusted disillusionment.

"He seemed of a sudden to fly into a great fury. The train was just making its stop at the end of the line, in Flushing. He rushed to the forward platform and somehow broke the coupling. At the same moment, the car began running backward along the track by which we had come. There was no chance for us to get off, even if we had been young and active. The doors were not opened, it happened so quickly.

"Then he came into the car, muttering to himself. His eye caught the sign of painted tin they put in the windows to show the destination of the trains. He snatched the plate lettered 'Flushing' and tore it to bits with his rough hands, as if it had been cardboard, throwing the pieces down and stamping on them.

" 'That is not Flushing. Not *my* Flushing— not *Vlissingen!* But I will find it. I will go there, and not all the devils in Hell nor all the angels in Heaven shall stop me!'

"He glowered at us, beating his breast with his clenched fists, as if angry and resentful at us for having deceived him in some manner. It was then that Mrs. Herrick stooped over and took my hand. We had gotten up close to the door to step out at the World's Fair station, but the car did not stop. It continued its wild career straight on, at dizzy speed.

" '*Rugwaartsch*!' he shouted, or something equally unintelligible. '*Back* I must go, like always, but yet will find my Vlissingen!'

"Then followed the horror of pitching headlong into those trains! The first one we saw coming, Mrs. Herrick screamed. I put my arm around her and braced myself as best I could with my cane. But there was no crash, just a

blinding succession of lights and colors, in quick winks. We seemed to go straight through that train, from end to end, at lightning speed, but there was not even a jar. I do not understand that, for I saw it coming, clearly. Since, there have been many others. I have lost count now, we meet so many, and swing from one track to another so giddily at the end of runs.

"But we have learned, Mrs. Herrick and I, not to dread the collisions — or say, passage— so much. We are more afraid of what the bearded ruffian who dominates this car will do next— surely we cannot go on this way much longer, it has already been many, many hours. I cannot comprehend why the stupid people who run the Interboro do not do something to stop us, so that the police could subdue this maniac and I can have Henry take me to the District Attorney."

SO READ the first few pages of the notebook turned over to me by the Missing Persons Bureau. Neither Mrs. Herrick, nor Mr. Dennison, whose handwriting it is, has been found yet, nor the guard he mentions. In contradiction, the Interboro insists no guard employed by them is unaccounted for, and further, that they never had had a man of the above description on their payrolls.

On the other hand, they have as yet produced no satisfactory explanation of how the car broke loose from the train at Flushing.

I agree with the police that this notebook contains matter that may have some bearing on the disappearances of these two unfortunate citizens; yet here in the Psychiatric Clinic we are by no means agreed as to the interpretation of this provocative and baffling diary.

The portion I have just quoted was written with a fountain pen in a crabbed, tremulous hand, quite exactly corresponding to the latest examples of old Mr. Dennison's writing. Then we find a score or more of pages torn out, and a resumption of the record in indelible pencil. The handwriting here is considerably stronger and more assured, yet unmistakably that of the same person. Farther on, there are other places where pages have been torn from the book, and evidence that the journal was but intermittently kept. I quote now all that is legible of the remainder of it.

"JUDGING by the alternations of the cold and hot seasons, we have now been on this weird and pointless journey for more than ten years. Oddly enough, we do not suffer physically, although the interminable rushing up and down these caverns under the streets becomes boring. The ordinary wants of the body are strangely absent, or dulled. We sense heat and cold, for example, but do not find their extremes particularly uncomfortable, while food has

become an item of far distant memory. I imagine, though, we must sleep a good deal.

"The guard has very little to do with us, ignoring us most of the time as if we did not exist. He spends his days sitting brooding at the far end of the car, staring at the floor, mumbling in his wild, red beard. On other days he will get up and peer fixedly ahead, as if seeking something. Again, he will pace the aisle in obvious anguish, flinging his outlandish curses over his shoulder as he goes. '*Verdoemd*' and '*verwenscht*' are the commonest ones— we have learned to recognize them— and he tears his hair in frenzy whenever he pronounces them. His name, he says, is Van Der Decken, and we find it politic to call him 'Captain.'

"I have destroyed what I wrote during the early years (all but the account of the very first day); it seems rather querulous and hysterical now. I was not in good health then, I think, but I have improved noticeably here, and that without medical care. Much of my stiffness, due to a recent arthritis, has left me, and I seem to hear better.

"Mrs. Herrick and I have long since become accustomed to our forced companionship, and we have learned much about each other. At first, we both worried a good deal over our families' concern about our absence. But when this odd and purposeless kidnapping occurred, we were already so nearly to the end of life (being of about the same age) that we finally concluded our children and grand-children must have been prepared for our going soon, in any event. It left us only with the problem of enduring the tedium of the interminable rolling through the tubes of the Interboro.

"In the pages I have deleted, I made much of the annoyance we experienced during the early weeks due to flickering through oncoming trains. That soon came to be so commonplace, occurring as it did every few minutes, that it became as unnoticeable as our breathing. As we lost the fear of imminent disaster, our riding became more and more burdensome through the deadly monotony of the tunnels.

"Mrs. Herrick and I diverted ourselves by talking (and to think in my earlier entries in this journal I complained of her garrulousness!) or by trying to guess at what was going on in the city above us by watching the crowds on the station platforms. That is a difficult game, because we are running so swiftly, and there are frequent intervening trains. A thing that has caused us much speculation and discussion is the changing type of advertising on the bill-posters. Nowadays they are featuring the old favorites— many of the newer toothpastes and medicines seem to have been withdrawn. Did they fail, or has a wave of conservative reaction overwhelmed the country?

"Another marvel in the weird life we lead is the juvenescence of our home, the runaway car we are confined to. In spite of its unremitting use, always at top speed, it has become steadily brighter, more new-looking. Today it has the appearance of having been recently delivered from the builders' shops.

I learned half a century ago that having nothing to do, and all the time in the world to do it in, is the surest way to get nothing done. In looking in this book, I find it has been ten years since I made an entry! It is a fair indication of the idle, routine life in this wandering car. The very invariableness of our existence has discouraged keeping notes. But recent developments are beginning to force me to face a situation that has been growing ever more obvious. The cumulative evidence is by now almost overwhelming that this state of ours has a meaning— has an explanation. Yet I dread to think the thing through— to call its name! Because there will be two ways to interpret it. Either it is as I am driven to conclude, or else I...

"I must talk it over frankly with Nellie Herrick. She is remarkably poised and level-headed, and understanding. She and I have matured a delightful friendship.

"What disturbs me more than anything is the trend in advertising. They are selling products again that were popular so long ago that I had actually forgotten them. And the appeals are made in the idiom of years ago. Lately it has been hard to see the posters, the station platforms are so full. In the crowds are many uniforms, soldiers and sailors. We infer from that there is another war— but the awful question is, 'What war?'

"Those are some of the things we can observe in the world over there. In our own little fleeting world, things have developed even more inexplicably. My health and appearance, notably. My hair is no longer white! It is turning dark again in the back, and on top. And the same is true of Nellie's. There are other similar changes for the better. I see much more clearly and my hearing is practically perfect.

"The culmination of these disturbing signals of retrogression has come with the newest posters. It is their appearance that forces me to face the facts. Behind the crowds we glimpse new appeals, many and insistent— 'BUY VICTORY LOAN BONDS!' From the number of them to be seen, one would think we were back in the happy days of 1919, when the soldiers were coming home from the World War.

My talk with Nellie has been most comforting and reassuring. It is hardly likely that we should both be insane and have identical symptoms. The inescapable conclusion that I dreaded to put into words is *so*— it must be so. In some unaccountable manner, we are *unliving* life! Time is going backward! '*Rugwaartsch*,' the mad Dutchman said that first day when he turned back

from Flushing; 'we will go backward'— to *his* Flushing, the one he knew. Who knows what Flushing he knew? It must be the Flushing of another age, or else why should the deranged wizard (if it is he who has thus reversed time) choose a path through time itself? Helpless, we can only wait and see how far he will take us.

"We are not wholly satisfied with our new theory. Everything does not go backward; otherwise how could it be possible for me to write these lines? I think we are like flies crawling up the walls of an elevator cab while it is in full descent. Their own proper movements, relative to their environment, are upward, but all the while they are being carried relentlessly downward. It is a sobering thought. Yet we are both relieved that we should have been able to speak it. Nellie admits that she has been troubled for some time, hesitating to voice the thought. She called my attention to the subtle way in which our clothing has been changing, an almost imperceptible de-evolution in style.

"We are now on the lookout for ways in which to date ourselves in this headlong plunging into the past. Shortly after writing the above, we were favored with one opportunity not to be mistaken. It was the night of the Armistice. What a night in the subway! Then followed, in inverse order, the various issues of the Liberty Bonds. Over forty years ago— counting time both ways, forward, then again backward— *I* was up there, a dollar-a-year man, selling them on the streets. Now we suffer a new anguish, imprisoned down here in this racing subway car. The evidence all around us brings a nostalgia that is almost intolerable. None of us knows how perfect his memory is until it is thus prompted. But we cannot go up there, we can only guess at what is going on above us.

"The realization of what is really happening to us has caused us to be less antagonistic to our conductor. His sullen brooding makes us wonder whether he is not a fellow victim, rather than our abductor, he seems so unaware of us usually. At other times, we regard him as the principal in this drama of the gods and are bewildered at the curious twist of Fate that has entangled us with the destiny of the unhappy Van Der Dechen, for unhappy he certainly is. Our anger at his arrogant behavior has long since died away. We can see that some secret sorrow gnaws continually at his heart.

" 'There is *een vloek* over me,' he said gravely, one day, halting unexpectedly before us in the midst of one of his agitated pacings of the aisle. He seemed to be trying to explain— apologize for, if you will— our situation. 'Accursed I am, damned!' He drew a great breath, looking at us appealingly. Then his black mood came back on him with a rush, and he strode away growling mighty Dutch oaths. 'But I will best them— God Himself shall not prevent me— not if it takes all eternity!'

"Our orbit is growing more restricted. It is a long time now since we went to Brooklyn, and only the other day we swerved suddenly at Times Square and cut through to Grand Central. Considering this circumstance, the type of car we are in now, and our costumes, we must be in 1905 or thereabouts. That is a year I remember with great vividness. It was the year I first came to New York. I keep speculating on what will become of us. In another year we will have plummeted the full history of the subway. What then? Will that be the end?

"Nellie is the soul of patience. It is a piece of great fortune, a blessing, that since we were doomed to this wild ride, we happened in it together. Our friendship has ripened into a warm affection that lightens the gloom of this tedious wandering.

"It must have been last night that we emerged from the caves of Manhattan. Thirty-four years of darkness is ended. We are now out in the country, going west. Our vehicle is not the same, it is an old-fashioned day coach, and ahead is a small locomotive. We cannot see engineer or fireman, but Van Der Decken frequently ventures across the swaying, open platform and mounts the tender, where he stands firmly with wide-spread legs, scanning the country ahead through an old brass long-glass. His uniform is more nautical than railroadish— it took the sunlight to show that to us. There was always the hint of salt air about him. We should have known who he was from his insistence on being addressed as Captain.

"The outside world is moving backward! When we look closely at the wagons and buggies in the muddy trails alongside the right of way fence, we can see that the horses or mules are walking or running backward. But we pass them so quickly, as a rule, that their real motion is inconspicuous. We are too grateful for the sunshine and the trees after so many years of gloom, to quibble about this topsy-turvy condition.

"Five years in the open has taught us much about Nature in reverse. There is not so much difference as one would suppose. It took us a long time to notice that the sun rose in the west and sank in the east. Summer follows winter, as it always has. It was our first spring, or rather, the season that we have come to regard as spring, that we were really disconcerted. The trees were bare, the skies cloudy, and the weather cool. We could not know, at first sight, whether we had emerged into spring or fall.

"The ground was wet, and gradually white patches of snow were forming. Soon, the snow covered everything. The sky darkened and the snow began to flurry, drifting and swirling upward, out of sight. Later we saw the ground covered with dead leaves, so we thought it must be fall. Then a few of the trees were seen to have leaves, then all. Soon the forests were in the full glory of red and brown autumn leaves, but in a few weeks those colors turned

gradually through oranges and yellows to dark greens, and we were in full summer. Our 'fall,' which succeeded the summer, was almost normal, except toward the end, when the leaves brightened into paler greens, dwindled little by little to mere buds and then disappeared within the trees.

"The passage of a troop train, its windows crowded with campaign-hatted heads and waving arms tells us another war has begun (or more properly, ended). The soldiers are returning from Cuba. *Our* wars, in this backward way by which we approach and end in anxiety! More nostalgia— I finished that war as a major. I keep looking eagerly at the throngs on the platforms of the railroad stations as we sweep by them, hoping to sight a familiar face among the yellow-legged cavalry. More than eighty years ago it was, as I reckon it, forty years of it spent on the road to senility and another forty back to the prime of life.

"Somewhere among those blue-uniformed veterans am I, in my original phase, I cannot know just where, because my memory is vague as to the dates. I have caught myself entertaining the idea of stopping this giddy flight into the past, of getting out and finding my way to my former home. Only, if I could, I would be creating tremendous problems— there would have to be some sort of mutual accommodation between my *alter ego* and me. It looks impossible, and there are no precedents to guide us.

"Then, all my affairs have become complicated by the existence of Nell. She and I have had many talks about this strange state of affairs, but they are rarely conclusive. I think I must have over-estimated her judgment a little in the beginning. But it really doesn't matter. She has developed into a stunning woman and her quick, ready sympathy makes up for her lack in that direction. I glory particularly in her hair, which she lets down some days. It is thick and long and beautifully wavy, as hair should be. We often sit on the back platform and she allows it to blow free in the breeze, all the time laughing at me because I adore it so.

"Captain Van Der Decken notices us not at all, unless in scorn. His mind, his whole being, is centered on getting back to Flushing— *his* Flushing, that he calls Vlissingen— wherever that may be in time or space. Well, it appears that he is taking us back, too, but it is backward in time for us. As for him, time seems meaningless. He is unchangeable. Not a single hair of that piratical beard has altered since that far-future day of long ago when he broke our car away from the Interboro train in Queens. Perhaps he suffers from the same sort of unpleasant immortality the mythical Wandering Jew is said to be afflicted with— otherwise why should he complain so bitterly of the curse he says is upon him?

"Nowadays he talks to himself much of the time, mainly about his ship. It is that which he hopes to find since the Flushing beyond New York proved not to be the one he strove for. He says he left it cruising along a rocky coast. He has either forgotten where he left it or it is no longer there, for we have gone to all the coastal points touched by the railroads. Each failure brings fresh storms of rage and blasphemy; not even perpetual frustration seems to abate the man's determination or capacity for fury.

"That Dutchman has switched trains on us again! This one hasn't even Pintsch gas, nothing but coal oil. It is smoky and it stinks. The engine is a woodburner with a balloon stack. The sparks are very bad and we cough a lot.

"I went last night when the Dutchman wasn't looking and took a look into the cab of the engine. There is no crew and I found the throttle closed. A few years back that would have struck me as odd, but now I have to accept it. I did mean to stop the train so I could take Nell off, but there is no way to stop it. It just goes along, I don't know how.

"On the way back I met the Dutchman, shouting and swearing the way he does, on the forward platform. I tried to throw him off the train. I am as big and strong as he is and I don't see why I should put up with his overbearing ways. But when I went to grab him, my hands closed right through. The man is not real! It is strange I never noticed that before. Maybe that is why there is no way to stop the train, and why nobody ever seems to notice us. Maybe the train is not real, either. I must look tomorrow and see whether it casts a shadow. Perhaps even*we* are not...

"But Nell is real. I *know* that.

The other night we passed a depot platform where there was a political rally— a torchlight parade. They were carrying banners. 'Garfield for President.' If we are ever to get off this train, we must do it soon.

"Nell says no, it would be embarrassing. I try to talk seriously to her about us, but she just laughs and kisses me and says let well enough alone. I wouldn't mind starting life over again, even if these towns do look pretty rough. But Nell says that she was brought up on a Kansas farm by a step-mother and she would rather go on to the end and vanish, if need be, than go back to it.

"That thing about the end troubles me a lot, and I wish she wouldn't keep mentioning it. It was only lately that I thought about it much, and it worries me more than death ever did in the old days. *We know when it will be*! 1860 for me— on the third day of August. The last ten years will be terrible— getting smaller, weaker, more helpless all the time, and winding up as a messy, squally baby. Why, that means I have only about ten more years that are fit to live; when I was this young before, I had a lifetime ahead. It's not right! And now

she has made a silly little vow— 'Until birth do us part!'— and made me say it with her!

"It is too crowded in here, and it jolts awfully. Nell and I are cooped up in the front seats and the Captain stays in the back part— the quarterdeck, he calls it. Sometimes he opens the door and climbs up into the driver's seat. There is no driver, but we have a four-horse team and they gallop all the time, day and night. The Captain says we must use a stagecoach, because he has tried all the railroad tracks and none of them is right. He wants to get back to the sea he came from and to his ship. He is not afraid that it has been stolen, for he says most men are afraid of it— it is a haunted ship, it appears, and brings bad luck.

"We passed two men on horses this morning. One was going our way and met the other coming. The other fellow stopped him and I heard him holler, 'They killed Custer and all his men!' and the man that was going the same way we were said, 'The bloodthirsty heathens! I'm a-going to jine!'

Nellie cries a lot. She's afraid of Indians. I'm not afraid of Indians. I would like to see one.

"I wish it was a boy with me, instead of this little girl. Then we could do something. All she wants to do is play with that fool dolly. We could make some bows and arrows and shoot at the buffaloes, but she says that is wicked.

"I tried to get the Captain to talk to me, but he won't. He just laughed and laughed, and said,

" '*Een tijd kiezen voor— op schip*!'

"That made me mad, talking crazy talk like that, and I told him so.

" 'Time!' he bellows, laughing like everything.' 'Twill all be right in time!' And he looks hard at me, showing his big teeth in his beard. 'Four— five— six hundred years— more— it is nothing. I have all eternity! But one more on my ship, I will get there. I have sworn it! You come with me and I will show you the sea— the great Indian Sea behind the Cape of Good Hope. Then some day, if those accursed head winds abate, I will take you home with me to Flushing. That I will, though the Devil himself, or all the—' And then he went off to cursing and swearing the way he always does in his crazy Dutchman's talk.

"Nellie is mean to me. She is too bossy. She says she will not play unless I write in the book. She says I am supposed to write something in the book every day. There is not anything to put in the book. Same old stagecoach. Same old Captain. Same old everything. I do not like the Captain. He is crazy. In the night-time he points at the stars shining through the roof of the coach and laughs and laughs. Then he gets mad, and swears and curses something awful. When I get big again, I am going to kill him— I wish we could get away— I am afraid— it would be nice if we could find mamma—"

THIS terminates the legible part of the notebook. All of the writing purporting to have been done in the stagecoach is shaky, and the letters are much larger than earlier in the script. The rest of the contents is infantile scribblings, or grotesque childish drawings. Some of them show feathered Indians drawing bows and shooting arrows. The very last one seems to represent a straight up and down cliff with wiggly lines at the bottom to suggest waves, and off a little way is a crude drawing of a galleon or other antique ship.

This notebook, together with Mr. Dennison's hat and cane and Mrs. Herrick's handbag, were found in the derailed car that broke away from the Flushing train and plunged off the track into the Meadows. The police are still maintaining a perfunctory hunt for the two missing persons, but I think the fact they brought this journal to us clearly indicates they consider the search hopeless. Personally, I really do not see of what help these notes can be. I fear that by now Mr. Dennison and Mrs. Herrick are quite inaccessible.

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16: The Superlous Phantom

Malcolm Jameson

Weird Tales, March 1942

THE Lights in the stalled subway train blinked and went out. A foreman leaned over the edge of the platform and waved a lantern.

"Okay, men— the current's off. Grab him and get him up outa there. That's swell! Now— up here with him."

The two guards down on the tracks heaved and swung. The limp form rose and slid onto the station platform, then lay motionless. The morbid, sensation-hungry crowd that gathers as if by magic at every disaster, however trivial, reluctantly backed away a little, leaving a clear spot in the center of which lay the inert figure in its dirt-smeared, mussed brown suit. Only one man pushed forward— a smallish middleaged man with a moth-eaten looking goatee and carrying a dilapidated black satchel.

"I'm a doctor," he told the guard who tried to stop him. He dropped to his knees and put a hand on the prostrate man's chest. In a moment he stood up, shaking his head with an air of solemn finality. "He's gone. No pulse— no respiration. There is nothing to be done."

Some in the crowd thought they saw a sudden tremor sweep the corpse, one man claimed afterward that he saw an eyelid flicker, but at the moment no one said anything. They simply stood, as metropolitan crowds usually do under the circumstances, popeyed, gaping and moronic— looking on for the sheer lust of seeing.

The doctor did not wait, but bustled away as if in a great hurry to keep an appointment. The crowd closed its ranks behind him and continued to stare. There would be other things to see, soon. The police would come, and reporters and stretcher bearers. And best of all, photographers. Every super-moron there was dumbly hoping that somehow he might get included in the picture so as to have something to boast of to his friends tomorrow. 'Then, above in the street a gong clanged and a siren shrieked its wailing song. The climax was at hand!

"All right, all right— outa the way, you— get going!"

Husky policemen shouldered their way through the mass of thrill seekers in a resistless phalanx. The sergeant's eye caught the picture of the train stalled halfway down the platform and thought he knew the answer— another suicide. But when he broke through to the inner circle and saw the prone figure on the concrete he saw that there was no blood on it. The guard shrugged and jerked a thumb toward the track. "Third rail," was all he said. "The guy's dead."

The sergeant wheeled and called out to the men behind him.

"A shock case, fellows. Jump up to the wagon and bring down the pulmotor. Then go to work on him and don't let up until I give the word. I've seen these third-railers pull through before."

The Emergency Squad went into action and while they were administering artificial respiration other cops cleared the jammed station. One by one the onlookers gave ground.

"Such a nice looking young man," commiserated one woman. "It's a pity. Too bad they didn't catch the man that pushed him." But nobody paid attention. As they shuffled out a cameraman came dashing in, demanding, "Where's the stiff?" and the outgoing sheep sighed. But they consoled themselves with the thought that in the very next editions they would be reading something like this:

"During the early rush hour today, a young man tentatively identified as John Wicks, 24, address unknown, jumped or fell in front of an uptown local. Trainman Horatio Z. Evans managed to stop the train before the wheels passed over the body, but when Wicks was extricated from beneath the first car it was found he had been electrocuted. Police rendered first aid, but their efforts proved unavailing. Service was resumed after a short delay."

That is, that is what they expected to read. But, as a matter of fact, they did nothing of the sort. For the first aid efforts did avail.

After a few hours of mauling Johnny Wicks opened his eyes and saw the cops bending over him.

"Aw, lay off, won't you," he begged, "I wanna sleep."

Whereupon he tried to roll over and call it a day. They didn't let him do that, of course, but that is neither here not there. The big thing— the main point to be remembered about the little episode is this: Johnny Wicks did not die! Not for an instant.

We-ell— maybe for an instant, or for a couple of instants— but hardly longer than that. After a little he signed a lot of papers, then walked home, more sore about ruining his new brown suit than anything. He would have to throw it away, now. The only other immediate consequence of his mishap was that for a few days he had to take a lot of kidding from his friends. After that the memory of it simply faded into the past. He hardly ever thought of it any more.

THE summer turned into fall, fall into winter, and in the course of time it was summer again. It was on a hot August night that Johnny went to bed early so as to be up early the next day. He was about to go on his vacation and did not mean to lose an hour of it. He was considerably annoyed, therefore, when

shortly after he fell asleep he woke up again. It was with a sudden, scared start that puzzled him, and to add to his mystification an unseasonally icy gust of wind swept the room. Somehow there was a hint of the uncanny in it and his skin goose-pimpled and crawled in spite of him, for he thought he detected in the chill air the mouldy odor of the grave— an observation which itself stuck him as odd the moment he made it, for not once in his whole life had he smelled a grave.

He glanced at the clock and saw by its luminous face that it was exactly midnight. At the same instant he unaccountably remembered that it was just a year to the day since he had that ridiculous experience in the subway when the jostling of a hoodlum had caused him to be pronounced dead. But that was water over the dam, Wicks told himself and reached down for the cover. He was not going to stay awake and suffer, even if it was a cold night in August.

It was then he saw It.

"What's the big idea?" he demanded angrily of the seven-foot smoky apparition standing at the foot of his bed. The thing was vague and whitish, and as he challenged it it raised two elongated skinny arms and spread two sets of wispy, talon-like fingers.

"*Who-o-o-o-osh! Ye-e-e-a-ow! Screee-e— e— e*," was what the thing said back to him, the last of its unearthly wails tapering off into a strangled silence.

"Oh, a ghost, huh?" commented Johnny, sitting upright in bed, wide awake by then. "Well, ghosty, run along and peddle your apples somewhere else. I haven't murdered anybody and nobody was ever murdered in this room that I know of. Anyhow, I don't believe in ghosts, so you're wasting time. Scram!"

Johnny Wicks slid down into the bed again and adjusted his pillow. But he kept a wary eye on the amorphous cloud hovering over the foot of his bed. It was waveringly condensing into something shaped much more like a man, but except for its initial screeches had uttered no other sound. Presently the apparition completed its reorganization. Then it stretched forth its ghostly arm and pointed an accusatory finger at the young fellow in the bed.

"You didn't kill me, no," admitted the ghost, croaking the words in a deep sepulchral voice, "but you're doing something worse and I can't stand it." It suddenly struck Johnny that the voice sounded a great deal like his own— that is, what his own might sound like if he had a bad cold and shouted down a cistern. "You're ruining my career, that's what you're doing," reproached the spectral visitor, "and for no reason except your own damn selfishness."

Johnny Wicks was flabbergasted. He hadn't the slightest idea what the phantom was talking about.

"I'm not taking it lying down, either," continued the ghost, threateningly, his voice getting stronger and more distinct and more and more like Johnny's

own. "I'm going to haunt you until you make it right, that is what I'm going to do. You've gotta make things right— I can't go on this way."

The agitation of the spectre was painfully obvious. He swayed and twisted like a tornado cloud and his surfaces were wrinkled into little waves by the turbulence of the ethereal stuff of which he was composed. It made Johnny Wicks think of a dense cloud of cigar smoke over a poker table, stirred into erratic movement by the exhalations of the players.

"Me, Mac?" Johnny asked. "What have I got to do with you?" Then, realizing how ridiculous it was to be sitting up in bed at that time of night arguing with a strange ghost, he added, very firmly:

"Listen, you bunch of fog, whoever you are. I don't know you and I don't want to know you. I don't get your racket and I don't care a hang what it is. I'm not interested. I've got a lot of important sleeping to do between now and morning and I'm going to get on with it. So pull yourself together and get the hell outa here before I throw you out."

"Yeah!" sneered the ghost, immediately belligerent. "Well, try it."

He swelled up to double his size, looking very fearsome, and uttered another of his long-drawn "Whooshes."

"Bosh!" said Johnny, and reached for the light switch.

The illumination did not dispel the ghost, however. He was still here. At first he appeared to be a shapeless blue-green cloud, but he shrank rapidly until he seemed to be almost as solid as the living Johnny Wicks himself. And, to Johnny's further bewilderment, his own, exact double. Except that, instead of wearing pink pajamas, he wore the grease and lime stained brown suit of the night of the subway near-tragedy. It was amazing, for that suit had long since been burned.

"Start the rough stuff any time," challenged the ghost, insolently, "only I'd advise you to take it easy. You can sock me all right, but watch out you don't knock yourself out when you do. I'm not as solid as I look."

Johnny was already swinging when the ghost said that, but he hastily pulled his punch. The warning had the ring of sound advice. Yet he had promised to throw his unwanted visitor out and he had to make good. Otherwise he might find himself permanently haunted, and that was one thing that Johnny Wicks felt was unneeded to round out his life.

He considered the cloudy, nebulous nature of his guest and decided upon another maneuver. On his table stood an antiquated electric fan which he rarely used for the reason that it was so noisy. But now he plugged it in and flicked the switch. He trained it on the phantom, listened and watched as the wheezy motor buzzed up to speed, but little happened. His unsubstantial caller merely wavered ripplingly, but did not budge from where he stood. Nor did he

alter the supercilious I-told-you-so sneer that was on his face. That infuriated Johnny particularly, for he knew just what the thing was thinking— or thought he must— because it looked so exactly like himself.

"Live people," remarked the ghost with exasperating smugness, "often make that error. Because we look like smoke, they think we are smoke. But go ahead. Experiment all you want— I've got all eternity. Then when you've made up your mind you're stuck with me, we can get down to brass tacks. I came here to get justice, and by the Elder Shades, I'm going to get it, even if I have to haunt you night and day. And pal, believe me you. I'm one of the slickest haunters in the business. I'm only a young guy, but I've got a class A diploma from the S. P. S. and a cum laude to make it more binding."

Johnny Wicks gritted his teeth. The conceit and impudence of the fellow was unbearable. It was all the more so because of the fellow's close resemblance to him.

"And what the hell, if I may ask," put he frigidly, "is the S. P. S.?"

"Why, you poor dope— the Spooks Preparatory School," replied the phantom with some condescension. "You go there first— the minute you kick off. I was a natural for them. I got high marks in everything— chain clanking, body dragging, eerie yowling, materializations and dematerialization, stair-creaking, raising, mouldy odors, and all the rest of it. Gee! My prof was proud of me!"

The ghost paused to gloat a moment over the memory of his own prowess. Then his face suddenly clouded with the gloom he had displayed earlier. He sighed a dismal sigh— truly a ghastly sigh. "And to think," he went on bitterly, "that after that I am not allowed to practice. And all on account of you, leading your selfish, heedless life. Five times I've been, hat in hand, to the head office of the L. P. A. G., and five times they've chucked me out. They won't give me a haunting license."

Johnny thought the apparition was going to break down and weep, he looked so dejected. He wasn't at all sure he knew what the ghost was talking about, but since there appeared to be no way of getting rid of him, Johnny figured there could be no harm done in getting a little information. He was beginning to acquire an interest in the life and customs of the shades.

"If you were so darned good at the S. P. S.," he asked, "why is it that the L. P. A. G., whoever they are, won't let you practice? And when you bust in here and pester me this way, aren't you practicing? And when it comes to that, if you are unlicensed and I want to sleep, why shouldn't I report you to your own L. P. A. G. and let them handle it? I hate to be a squealer, Mac, but that's the way I feel about it."

"Go ahead and report," defied the ghost. "Nothing would suit me better. To get to the big shot you have to die and serve your apprenticeship. And that's all I want you to do. Then you'll meet the fellow in charge of assignments for the League for the Protection of Authentic Ghosts. He's the guy who says who can haunt and who can't, and dishes out the locations. If you're good— and on the level— he might slip you something choice, like the scene of a juicy triple murder. F'rinstance, I know a guy— but, oh hell, what's the use? I can't get anywhere as long as you're alive."

He stopped again and gave vent to another of his hollow sighs— a soul-wringing, swishy expiration calculated to send chills racing up and down the spine of any luckless listener. Those sighs were like gusts of stagnant air fanned from a long forgotten tomb.

"It's a lousy system," murmured the ghost disconsolately. "Why couldn't they have told me I was a phoney before I put in all that time and hard work at school?"

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Johnny Wicks, mildly. "I never considered that angle. But now that you bring it up, I thought that all ghosts were phoney. What makes you any different?"

"I'm illegitimate, that's what," replied the spectre sullenly. "You double-crossed me— you didn't stay dead like you oughta had. That leaves me in a tough spot."

The meaning of this strange interview was beginning to dawn on Johnny's mind. Could it be that during the brief time he was unconscious that night that he had generated a ghost— a premature one, so to speak? But the ghost was continuing to pour out his woes.

"You see, I can't prove that I… that is, you… I mean we— Oh, skip it, you know what I mean… that one or the other of us was killed when you fell on the third rail. I admit I was wrong— I shoulda waited. But when that doctor guy stepped right up and said you were dead, that was enough for me. I took right off. The next thing I knew I was in the primary class at the S. P. S. It was only last night when I took the final tests for a license that I found out you didn't die at all. They put me on cemetery patrol, but there wasn't a grave there I could call my own. The examiner got suspicious and wanted to see my death certificate. Of course, you know, every ghost don't have to have a grave— like the ones of fellows eaten by tigers and things like that— but they do have to be dead.

"So they looked up my pedigree. Now I'm sunk. They say that as long as you're alive, I don't even exist. Can you tie that?"

"It's tough," conceded Johnny Wicks, "but I don't see what I can do about it."

"You bet it's tough," replied the ghost fiercely, "and there's plenty you can do about it. You gotta make it right. You gotta kick off for keeps. Hang yourself, jump out the window or take a slug of cyanide— it's all the same to me. But make it snappy so we can get back to headquarters in time to qualify."

"Never mind the 'we,' " said Johnny, a little angrily. "You leave me out of this. If you were dizzy enough to go off half-cocked on account of what some stranger said, that's your hard luck. Why, you silly nitwit, you didn't even know whether the fellow was a regular doctor or not. Anyhow, if you think I'm going to kill myself just to get you out of a jam, you're plain nuts."

"You'll be sorry," threatened the ghost, puffing himself up to three times his former dimensions and taking on what was intended to be a terrifying look. "You haven't seen anything yet."

But Johnny Wicks was not going to be intimidated by any counterfeit ghost.

"Get this, spook," he said very determinedly, "you can go plumb to wherever it is that no-good ghosts go to. Or go haunt the bozo that pushed me— er, us— off the platform. Or try your luck on the Interboro; they were the people that furnished the juice that killed me— you— damn it, you've got me doing it now! Or take a crack at that gyp doctor that started the trouble. But lay off me."

With that he turned off the light, pulled the blanket over his head and paid no further attention to the screeches and howls that made the night hideous for awhile. Presently he fell asleep, and the phantom, discouraged by the indifferent snoring of his intended victim, faded slowly back into nothingness.

JOHNNY WICKS had a very pleasant vacation, unmarred by another visit from his spectral double. But the very first night he was back in town, the phantom appeared once more, making his entrance as before.

"Now what?" Johnny wanted to know, glowering at the intruder. Then he noticed his ghost appeared a good deal the worse for wear. One of his eyes had been blackened and his nose pushed out of place. He carried one arm in a sling and the hand of the other one was bandaged. He looked as if he had been the chief loser in a free-for-all.

"I tried all you said to do," complained the phantom reproachfully. "It won't work. So you've got to bump yourself off after all. That's what I came to tell you."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. It was this way. I looked up the coot who pushed us off the platform. What a souse! That fellow don't ever go to sleep— he just passes out. He's haunt-proof. Then I tried the subway. I couldn't work there, either. In the first place that station has four or five real ghosts on the job— suicides and

lushes— that specialize in platform work. What I didn't count on was all the dead groundhogs and blasters. Around midnight the tunnels are crawling with 'em. Some roughneck wanted to know who I was and wanted to see my card. Then a Floating Delegate came by, checking up, and he told 'em I was a phoney. So they ganged up on me. A mortal can't hurt a ghost, but another ghost can."

The phantom exhibited his injuries.

"What about the quack doctor?" asked Johnny, getting interested.

"Oh, him? That was worse. All doctors, even the good ones, are bad haunt prospects because too many people die under their hands for one reason or another. But that guy is in a class all to himself. The amount of malpractice he musta done would burn you up. I went up there one night, but couldn't get near the place, the ghosts were so thick. They asked me what I had against the bird and I told 'em. You shoulda heard 'em laugh. Then they ran me off the place."

"Well?"

"I'm just telling you. I tried to get by without your help, but it's no go. Now you've got to do the Dutch. It's the only way out."

"Go chase yourself," said Johnny, pulling up the covers.

"Tomorrow night I get tough," warned the phantom, then vanished.

The ghost did get tough. He tried all the tricks of his trade, but none of the ordinary ones worked. So he settled down to a campaign of incessant, interminable talk. He showed up every night promptly at the hour of twelve and gabbled until morning. Where howling and chain-clanking or being smothered under filmy shrouds had failed to disturb Johnny in the least, the constant chatter began to wear him down. He had to listen, for the ghost, being an offspring of his own self, knew all his inmost secrets— the things that Johnny had half-forgotten and was willing to keep forgotten. He was prodded and taunted for every mistake he had ever made, and for every evil thought. That went on, night after night, for months, until Johnny Wicks was near the breaking point. He lost flesh by the pound, his hair grayed, and he took on the haggard, frenzied appearance of a man on the verge of madness.

"You look like a ghost," his boss said to him one day, and Johnny jumped as if jabbed with a bayonet. The very word ghost, in his jittery condition, was almost more than he could stand. He wondered dumbly how much longer he could hold out. He had rebelled from the first on the suggestion of suicide, but lately it began to have an appeal. But, as is common in most people, the tendency to cling to life was strong, so he cast about for some means of eliminating his pestiferous double self.

He read books dealing with phantasms. Though he found that there were approved methods of exorcism as regards many, there was nothing that was helpful against ghosts. Silver bullets could dispose of werewolves, a stake through the heart would stop a vampire, garlic, crucifixes and other things were effective against certain classes of witches and demons. But man was helpless against ghostly persecution.

He complained to the police but the most helpful hint they gave him was that a short stay in Bellevue's psycopathic ward would do him no harm. Ghosts were out of their line. They couldn't be apprehended, or confined; bullets and blackjacks did not do them injury. Consequently, the police rule was to let them strictly alone. But they did recommend a lawyer who they said had some success in such matters.

Johnny Wicks took the address and looked him up. The lawyer was not an imposing one. On the contrary he was a dried-up wisp of a man of great but indeterminable age.

"Hmm," he said, when Johnny had poured out his story. "Quite unusual, this. Haunted by your own ghost, eh? Most extraordinary!"

He pulled down a calfskin bound volume and studied its index. Then he shook his head rather hopelessly.

"During the Middle Ages," he said, "there were numerous court decisions relating to ghosts and the like. But in our time the courts have the tendency to throw such cases out. The complainant against spectral annoyance rarely receives assistance. Here, for example. In an action brought by certain citizens of Calder's Falls, Idaho, against the Western Sextons' Association to abate nocturnal noises in the town's cemetery, the court held:

"—the defendant is in no respect liable for the behavior of ghosts operating upon his premises. Ghosts have repeatedly been held to be a species of ferae naturae, or wild beast, or wild and unaccountable creatures, without ownership and beyond control. Moreover, the tendency to haunt is a natural instinct with a ghost, and as such, in the absence of any statute specifically to the contrary, not an offense.' "

Johnny Wicks blinked. That did not sound helpful.

"That attitude is the common one," the lawyer went on to say. "Most judges would reject your case on the pretext that it does not fall within their jurisdiction. I am quite certain that should you attempt to obtain an injunction against your own ghost you would get nowhere. What he is attempting, of course, is a form of extortion, but it has been previously held that a man cannot blackmail himself. By extension, your own ghost, being a sort of alter ego, comes under the same rule. I am sorry, my young friend, but there appears to be nothing you can do."

Johnny sighed miserably. He was very tired and needed sleep badly. He wondered if it would not be wise to cut his throat and be done with it.

"However," remarked the old lawyer, shrewdly, "it follows that since you have no rights against the phantom, it also has none against you. You are perfectly free to deal with it as you choose."

"I know," said Johnny, hopelessly, "but how? You can't sock the thing, you can't pin it down, you can't outtalk it."

"Everything that ever lived is afraid of something," observed the sage old man. "What is your ghost afraid of?"

"Other ghosts," said Johnny, after a moment's reflection. "But I don't know any other ghosts."

"Think it over, son. There's your way out. Five dollars, please."

Johnny Wicks fumbled for the money, paid him, and staggered out. It was five dollars wasted; all he had learned was that he was trapped. His only release would be death. But at least he would not have to listen to the tirades of his nightly visitor.

That afternoon he visited a hockshop and bought a revolver. He took it home with him, loaded it and placed it on the table. Tonight was the night. He undressed, listless and numb, and fell onto the bed. Nothing mattered any more. He slept. Then, at midnight, there came the icy gust and with it his ghastly double.

"Do you remember the time…" began the ghost.

"Cut it," said Johnny, and snapped on the light. "You win."

He got up and picked up the pistol, whirled its cylinder and verified that it was loaded and ready to go. Then he faced the phantom. This time he was defiant, for a dazzlingly new idea had just popped into his mind.

"You win," he repeated, "but only the first round. In one minute I am going to blow my brains out. Then I'll be dead. That's what you want, isn't it?"

"Whatta pal!" exclaimed the ghost, beaming, "I knew you'd do the right thing."

"Okay. But wait. In a few seconds I'll be dead. Then I'll produce a real, honest-to-God ghost that won't look a thing like you— gray, thin, and older. Then I'll go straight to the L. P. A. G. and denounce you for the impostor you are. After that…" he paused for an ominous silence. The ghost quailed. "After that I'm coming back and going to rip that foggy hide right off your back. I'm going to take you apart, one bunch of smoke at a time, until I find out what makes you tick. Then I'm going to stop it ticking. Get that?"

"You can't do that to me!" wailed the spectre. "*Ye-e-e-ow. Screee-e*!"

"Watch me," said Johnny Wicks grimly, and put the gun to his temple. But he did not pull the trigger. The phantom was in a state of intense agitation, its

nebulous substance writhing and twisting horribly. But it was steadily growing fainter, and in half a minute or so more it became quite invisible. Johnny slowly lowered the gun. Then he tossed it into a drawer with a chuckle.

"What a damn fool I've been," he said to himself. "I might have known that the best way to handle a blackmailer is to call his bluff."

17: The Little Joker

David Graham Phillips

1867-1911

Cosmopolitan Sep 1911

Phillips was a journalist and novelist in the American muck-raking tradition, working for Hearst's Cosmopolitan *magazine. He was shot dead by Fitzhugh Coyle Goldsborough who believed that Phillips's novel* The Fashionable Adventures of Joshua Craig *maligned his family.*

PRATTVILLE, the last station on a nesty, weedy spur of the Pennsylvania system, consists of six or seven thousand people dozing together upon the flat black loam of central Illinois, embowered in its luxuriant vegetation six months of the year, and all but smothered in its luxuriant mud the other six months. The world knows not Prattville; but, by way of newspaper, book, magazine, and fashion journal, Prattville knows the world, the movements of elegant society both in the East and abroad, the latest creations in manners, ideas, and dress.

One summer the high society of Prattville was enlivened by two notable accessions, who sprang into instant popularity and stimulated the gaiety to the verge of giddiness— what Prattville called and thought giddiness. The reason for this memorable accession is interesting and even curious.

In a brief three months' .campaign through southern Michigan, Gentleman Joe Bemis and Lanky Carr— brother of that Lanky who several years later was lynched in the Ozark region— sold to four "leading agriculturists"' as many gold bricks of as alluring an exterior as any that Nosey Gonzalez ever manufactured in his plant in South Chicago. They came back to Chicago with nearly seventeen thousand in cash; having paid the chief of police the usual two thousand each for a permit of safe residence, they set about living like gentlemen until their money should be gone. But within a week the chief gave them the tip to jump, and jump quick.

"One of them jays," explained he— they were conferring in a ground-floor back room of Fatty Jessup's "gilded palace of sin'' in South Clark Street, and were drinking the carbonated Lake Erie catawba which Fatty bought at forty-two cents the bottle and sold as champagne at three seventy-five— "one of them Michigan clodmashers has got a pull," said the chief. "It's up to us to make a bluff at doin' something. So you and Lanky'll have to still-hunt for fresh air a month or two."

Lanky went East; Joe, not in the best of health through eating the rotten fodder those jays live on because they send everything decent they raise to the city— Joe decided to make a visit at home. Home meant Prattville, where his family was of the best and whence he had fled at thirteen with a minstrel show to become a circus follower and finally an all-round confidence man. As he had made his career under an assumed name, Prattville did not associate the occasional newspaper stories of Gentleman Joe Bemis with the eldest son of Judge Abbott, the son who was doing so well with stocks and the like in Chicago and New York.

As Prattville with no companionship would be intolerable for him for more than two or three days, Joe looked around among his acquaintances for one who would be presentable and also could be trusted with the secret. He chose young Jack Candless, handsome, a "swell dresser," and so well mannered and so correct of grammar that it was difficult to believe him a graduate of the streets and the gangs. Being a professional sport, Jack was as much the outcast and the son of Hagar as was Joe; but he was not a crook. His instinct for square play, an inborn contempt for all forms of indirection as sneaking, had kept him straight in circumstances that might have crushed mere principle got by association and training. Virtue is as rare in the slums as vegetation above the snow-line— and as hardy.

Jack did not like Bemis, and had to do with him only as there is compulsion throughout the brotherhood of outcasts; but he accepted promptly. On his way from city to city he had often gazed with admiration and a certain vague envious longing at the quiet, beautiful little houses and villages, living a life exactly the opposite of that which had been his from birth in a tenement in Hell's Kitchen. And Joe's "invite" not only meant exploring that life of eventless peace; it also meant seeing and mingling with respectability. Jack had no desire to be respectable; on the contrary, he had a deep prejudice against respectability, the phases of it he had known having been repulsively smeared with hypocrisy— and in Jack Candless's view hypocrisy was the quintessence of the vices, the most craven form of cowardice. Still, he felt there must be something of value in anything so eagerly sought after and so tenaciously clung to as respectability; and until he found and weighed that something his education as a man of the world would not be complete.

"Don't forget my name's Joe Abbott down here," warned Bemis, as the train drew near Prattville. "Perhaps you'd better take a new handle, too, though you're not so well known as I— at least not et."

Like all the criminal class, Joe was exceedingly proud of his fame and of the solid basis in audacious achievement.

"How would Montague, or, better still, Champirey, strike you? Yes, John Champney— that'll do, as you've got all your stuff initialed 'J. C.' "

"Not I," said Candless, quietly, in the tone that settles things. "I fight under my own flag."

"But you mustn't let 'em know you're a sport," protested Abbott, alias Bemis. "I'll give out you're in the same line as I— stocks and real estate."

"As you please," conceded Jack. Stocks and real estate were of the same nature as cards and horses, were simply legalized branches of the profession, but really none the better for that, in the eyes of any sensible man.

Joe Abbott's rare visits home were always a delight. The whole town welcomed him, and he threw money about, flirted with the girls, organized picnics and moonlight dances, attended church with his father and mother, and in every way conducted himself like a pillar of the best society. Bringing the good-looking, agreeable if rather shy and silent Mr. Candless— "on his way to be a rich man," Joe assured everybody— Joe was doubly welcome. That month of June was the gayest Prattville had ever known. It was an old story to Joe, albeit an amusing one; to Jack, it was entirely new, and he was having the time of his life. Toward the end of the month, however, he suddenly sobered. On the first day of July, as he and Joe were shaving in their adjoining rooms at the old Abbott homestead, he called out,

"I'm leaving this afternoon."

"Leaving!" cried Joe. "Why, I thought you liked it."

"So I do," replied Candless. Half to himself he added, "Too well."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Abbott. "You're going to Olga Morton's picnic on the Fourth. I heard you tell her you'd come, in that stiff, cool manner of yours. That manner's great, Jack. It has made the whole town think you' ve got millions already. God, what a haul we could make if this wasn't home, sweet home! But I suppose you'd balk. It's dashed queer about you. For the life of me I can't see what difference it makes how you separate a mutt from his money. If anything, my way's the most novel. I always frame up the game so that the come-on thinks he's going to do me, and when I do him he has only learneda powerful moral lesson in the folly of trying to swindle. If the preachers would soft-pedal the alluring wickedness of sin and bear down hard on the folly of it, we'd have to go out of business, eh, Jack?"

No answer. Candless was shaving just under the jaw-bone, a difficult place when one has a jaw.

"Why shouldn't we give this town a lesson?" pursued Joe. "We could float a mine. You could get away with the goods, and I could save my face here by pretending you'd took me in, too."

"I'm leaving this afternoon," said Jack.

Young Abbott came to the doorway. "Look here, old man, if it's a question of funds, you know I've got a bunch, and of course I'll stake you."

"No, thanks, I'm a whole lot to the good, still."

"You ain't going to desert me, are you?" wheedled Joe.

"Sorry, Joe, but got to do it."

"What's up? Too slow here?" And Joe looked searchingly at the stern, handsome young Tace in which was already written so much of experience, of character; for character begins with the struggle to live, and that struggle had begun for Jack soon after he was weaned.

Before Joe's scrutiny, Candless hesitated, flushed. Then, gazing into the mirror, he said:

"I ought never to have come down here. I ought to have kept to my own kind."

Joe was puzzled for a moment; then a queer, ugly look came and went in his eyes— a revelation of the abhorrent actuality that lay in wait beneath that smooth, genial surface of his. "You don't mean you're stuck on Olga Morton?" Bantke he inquired, with raillery.

"Yes," said Jack curtly. He gave a short, savage laugh, and went on with his shaving.

Olga Morton, the gayest and the prettiest girl in Prattville, was of its aristocracy. In all times and in all places aristocracy means money, means those pursuing the occupations that bring most wealth with the least labor and happen to be regarded as respectable. In those days and in Prattville, dry goods, retail dry goods, was about as lucrative a line as was known. Hence the Mortons, the biggest dealers in dry goods in that section, were of the very top-notch aristocracy. For a Jack Candless, a professional sport, a common gambler, a man with no wealth, no reputation, no pros pects—for such a person to aspire to marry Olga Morton was an obvious absurdity. Joe felt like laughing in his face. If he hadn't been physically afraid of Jack, he would have told him what he thought of such impudence; for, in the bottom of his heart, Joe was an utter snob and looked on himself as high removed above all his pals because he had a father, two grand-fathers, and three great-grandfathers. But his physical fear of his guest, who had been a light-weight champion and would have swept the ring as a middle weight if he hadn't graduated into gambling, restrained him from even a covert sneer.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" said Joe.

Jack shrugged his superb shoulders. "Forget it, and hustle back to my own kind. I couldn't get her if I wanted her, and I wouldn't take her if she'd come. So it's me for Chicago by the two-o'clock express."

"Guess you're right, old man," said Abbott with a promptness of acquiescence that wounded and angered his guest. "Nothing doing there for you. She may have led you on, just to make things more interesting. But she'd simply laugh at you if you got sloppy."

"She'll not have the chance," retorted Jack, color high and head haughty. "I'll clear out and forget her. I think I'll push on East—make a little tour of the summer resorts. I'm playing a little too close to the edge of my velvet, anyhow."

"Go to New York," suggested Joe. ''The boys there have got next to the reform crowd, and everything goes again— even my line. I'll join you in about ten days."

Without saying good-by to anyone but the Abbotts, Jack departed for Chicago, a brave and smiling figure until the train pulled out of the Prattville station, then a melancholy, crushed heap in a corner chair in the parlor-car. He roused himself, tried to jeer himself out of his weakness. In Chicago he bucked the tiger like a crazy man. Allin vain. There, before his eyes, always, were the big, honest, innocent eyes of Olga Morton, and her slim, trim figure,and those slender hands and feet of the thoroughbred.

"It ain't fair," he said to himself. "If I'd had a ghost of a chance, I'd have won her. I know I could. She played up to me strong— as strong as a decent girl dares."

At times he almost decided to go back, make a clean breast of it, and try to get her to wait a few years for him. But the folly— and worse— of this was too clear for so clear headed a man. "I'm a born sport," he reminded himself. "Ill live and die one. Might as well talk about a nigger becoming a white man. If I told her I'd change, I'd be lying. And while she's gay and lively, it's in an innocent sort of a way. She'd hate this kind of life—and I'd despise her if she didn't!"

So Jack hung on at Chicago, like a man with a frightful pain who endures it because he feels it can't last and who wonders each moment if the next won't bring relief. He fell into the habit of dropping in at Fatty Jessup's every afternoon andevery evening. Fatty's place had not theretofore been one of his hang-outs; Fatty ran rather to crooks and the politicians that live upon the criminal class; and while Jack knew all that crowd, he preferred to associate with and to build himself up among the straight sports. He went to Jessup's because he was hoping to see Joe Bemis. Joe ought to be coming back; Joe would bring news of Olga Morton. One afternoon about a week after he left Prattville, he strolled in among Fatty's gilt columns and vast mirrors with their summer dress of pink gauze. He stood at the far end of the bar, with a sandwich and a glass of beer. Without realizing it he was watching the

"barkeep," Lefty Rucker, mix a singularly elaborate drink in a small thin glass, hardly larger than the kind used for liquors. His attention was finally fixed by Lefty's expression—a grin of wicked good nature and self-complacence.

"What's that mess you're getting together there?" inquired Jack.

Lefty put away the half-dozen bottles from each of which he had been pouring a few drops into the little glass. He held it up and gazed admiringly at its contents, almost colorless, just the faintest tinge of gold.

"This here?" said he. "It's what's called the 'little joker.' "

Jack knew Fatty's and its ways. He scowled. "Knock-out drops, eh?"

"Not on your life," replied Lefty. "We don't do nothing of that sort. We're high class— which," he added with his nasty grin, "means here, as elsewhere, doing as you please, but doing it lawful."

Jack understood. Some regular customer of Fatty's was having difficulty in carrying out his designs upon the victim he had lured to one of the famous infamous private dining-rooms up-stairs; Lefty's skill as a mixer of drinks had been enlisted. Jack was not profoundly shocked, not more shocked than one of the upper world would be at hearing that a high financier was swindling a multitude by an issue of worthless stocks, or that some rich man had circumvented a poor girl by offering her luxury, or had led her into the horrors of a hateful marriage by stupefying her moral sense and sense of decency with a dowry. He was as used to the "little jokers" of the underworld as we to the "little jokers" of the upper world. He was not shocked, but disgusted; for cowardice always disgusted him. He had no impulse to interfere; it was none of his business. He did not approve— far from it. But, as between underworld and upper world —as between those who lived by the various favored forms of s ocial piracy and those who lived by the smug and sneaking pilferings of trade and commerce and finance— of sanded sugar and overworked toiler and jobbery in necessities, money, stocks, and bonds— as between his own world and that other world with which he himself was at open war, he stood aloof when he could not stand with his own. He answered Lefty's laughter with a scowl, and turned about and left Fatty's place with a muttered: "Hell of a hole! I must keep out of it."

In the doorway he remembered his business, hesitated, returned. Lefty had just got under way, with the drink upon a tray.

"Seen Joe yet?" asked Jack.

"He's in the house right now," replied Lefty. "Want him?"

"I'll wait, if it isn't too long."

"I think he can come," said the bartender-waiter. "I'll just take this upstairs and tell him to come down."

Lefty disappeared through the door at that end of the bar—the door opening into the passageway from which ascended the stairway to the floor of small thickwalled dining-rooms with their padded doors. A few minutes later he returned with the empty tray. '"Joe's gone out," said he. "But he'll sure be in to-night. If 'tI I was you, I'd drop back here along about . eleven or twelve."

"I'll see,"' said Jack. "Tell him to come to Simpson's. I'm eating there. I'll be upstairs afterward."

He gave Lefty a dollar and went out. A few steps and something, some light missile from above, struck the top of his hat and ricochetted into the street. He saw it was a bit of bread-crust, and glanced up. The Venetian blind of one of Fatty's secondstory windows was swiftly and softly descending. Jack saw only a hand, a man's hand, a heavy ring on the little finger. Ring and hand and Lefty's statement together enabled him to recognize Gentleman Joe. On impulse he smiled at the window shade and waved friendlily; then, remembering the "little joker,' he frowned and strode on. It might not have been of Joe's ordering, but Joe was of the "little joker" sort of man— and not fit for a high-class sport to associate with. At the corner he glanced back— glanced upward at the shaded open window. The slats of the blind were level, and the light from without so fell that he had a faint, fleeting glimpse of the interior. He turned, strode on. As he went the fainter features of the interior that had been photographed for an instant on his retina began to come out not clearly, but in hazy and elusive fashion. What had he almost seen? Whom had he almost seen? Joe and— and—

Round he wheeled, rushed back to Clark Street, flinging men and boys out of his way, leaped across the street, dashed round to the "family entrance" of the dive, up the stairs four at a time. He tried the door of the room whose window he had been inspecting. It was locked; he put his shoulder against it, and it bent so that the lock gave and the door flew open. On the threshold of the adjoining connecting room stood Joe Abbott. As Candless, blazing insane rage and murder, advanced upon him, he hurled a champagne-bottle. It struck Jack full in the front of the head, crushing his hat-brim, sending him staggering against the wall, to slide to the floor. But before Joe could spring upon him, Jack rose. Joe darted out through the door, and Jack heard him leaping and crashing down the stairs. i

He staggered into the adjoining room. It was a mere box, gaily if cheaply furnished. On the sofa lay Olga Morton, in a sleep— or a stupor. Jack rang the bell violently; Lefty came on the run. He stared, mouth agape, when he saw Candless where he had expected to see Bemis.

"Why, where's Joe?" he exclaimed.

"Just stepped out for a moment," said Jack, calm and cool once more. ''When I want to bring this lady to, how can I do it?"

"Dead easy," Lefty assured him. "Just tie up some salt in the corner of a napkin, wet it, and put it in her mouth. Or slip a piece of ice inside her collar and down the small of her back. Want me to do it?"

"No, thanks," said Jack. "I'll look after her."

"Joe coming back?"

"Hardly think so," replied Jack. "I'll settle, if he don't."

"Oh, that's all right." And Lefty withdrew, closing the door behind him.

Jack returned to the inner room. Olga was still asleep— sleeping quietly, naturally, her face flushed, her lips parted in a faint smile. Jack arranged her skirts smoothly, so that even her feet were concealed; then he sat down to wait. Never had she been so pretty or more charming in the youth and grace of her figure, the youth and grace of her small oval face, the delicate form and color of her small ear, peeping coquettishly from her thick wavy auburn hair. A' the young sport looked his expression grew tender, sad, tragic. Her eyes opened; her glance, sweet, frank, innocent, like the soft friendly inquiry in the eyes of a young deer that has not yet heard about hunters, rested upon him, puzzled, then astonished, then smiling. As she became completely conscious, she blushed, sprang up.

"Gracious!" she exclaimed. "Why, I must have fallen asleep." With a frown and a pout, "I told Joe I couldn't drink, that the least bit made me drowsy." A quick glance around, then, "Where is he?"

'Gone out," said Jack.

"Oh!" Her exclamation seemed a careless comment upon a matter which was of no consequence. She stood at the window. "So you decided to come back right away?"

"Yes," said Jack.

"I saw you, and I couldn't resist the temptation to throw that bread on your hat." She was sparkling and showing her even white teeth; her glance fell upon his brow. "Why! Your forehead's swollen!"

"Yes," said Jack.

"Let me put some ice-water on it. However did you get such a bruise?"

"It's nothing," said Jack.

She ran into the other room; he rose and followed. As she advanced toward him with a wet napkin, he waved her back.

"Sit down," he commanded. "I want to talk to you."

She looked astonished, a little frightened. "What a strange tone!" cried she, glancing anxiously up at him. "Are you offended? Do you think it wasn't right

for me to take that drink?" She turned toward the table. There stood the little glass, almost full. "You can see for yourself, I barely touched 1"

"Lucky," said Jack.

A strained silence; then she said, "How much longer is Mr. Abbott going to be gone?"

"He's not coming back," replied Candless. "Please sit down."

"Don't stare at me in that queer way," she commanded impatiently. But she seated herself at the table. "After all," she added, "it's none of your business what I do."

"None in the world," admitted Jack, seating himself opposite her at the little table with the finger-bowls and small coffee cups still on it. "Because I love you don't give me any right over you, does it?"

She glanced at him in a pleased, startled way, blushed, laughed. "Why didn't you say so down home,"' she demanded, "when"— with a mischievous smile— "when I gave you every chance?"

"Because I'm not actually crazy about making a fool of myself."

Another strained silence, he gazing at her, she gazing into the little glass with the innocent-looking, pale-gold poison. She rose. "I'm not going to wait any longer," said she. "Anyhow, it's no use." She seated herself again and, with forearms on the table and clasped, nervous hands and flushed cheeks, she leaned toward him and talked rapidly: "On the way up here— on the train, I realized I was doing something very, very silly. Id never have run away from home with Joe if father hadn't forbidden me to see him. I don't know what got into father. He's always been so busy, he never paid the least attention to me. Anyhow, he just up and said I wasn't to see Joe again— said he had heard something about him, but wouldn't tell me what it was, he being such a friend of Joe's father. I got on my high horse, and he got on his. It was the first time in my life I'd ever been forbidden to do anything, and I simply couldn't stand for it."

Jack nodded sympathetically, lighted a cigarette.

"Besides,' continued the girl, "I was sick and tired of Prattville. It always has seemed dull. It seemed duller than ever after— after— you left."

There Miss Morton colored violently, but not more violently than did Mr. Candless. Neither was looking at the other. She began to dabble the tips of her rosy fingers in the finger-bowl, he to fidget with the matches. He finally set them off. When the excitement and smoke and smell had subsided, she said:

"I really mustn't wait any longer. I want to send that telegram home, to ease their minds and tell them I'm coming. Besides, I don't like it here, somehow. It's such a queer sort of place. I never was where they served drinks

before— never in my life. Oh, I know it's all right or you and Joe wouldn't let me come here."'

"*Me* and Joe?" said Jack.

"It is all right, isn't it?"

"Good enough for Joe— and me," replied Candless. "Let's go."

"We can leave word for him— that we'll be back. My train don't go till four o'clock."

"Yes, we can leave word."

"What are you thinking about?"

"You and Joe— and me," said Jack.

Miss Morton went into the little sittingroom, arranged her hair and her hat, reappeared, looking radiant and more deliciously young and innocent than ever. 'Come along,"' said she to Jack, who was in a brown study. "What are you thinking about?" With a frown: 'How I do hate to go back to Prattville! But I simply can't marry Joe."

"No," said Jack.

She went out and down the stairs, he following. As they advanced into the street, a newsboy came along shouting an extra— "All about the elopement of a Prattville heiress with Gentleman Joe!"

Miss Morton halted, gasped, grew white, caught Jack's arm, leaned heavily on it.

"Good gracious!"' she exclaimed. "It's out! Oh, hide me somewhere. What shall I do? Hide me, please! Oh, I can't go back now. I can't! Why, however did it get out so soon? Papa must have gone wild and made a fool of himself. He hasn't any head at all. Oh, dear!" And she began to sob.

Jack hailed a hansom. When it was before them at the curb he said to the driver, "To Lincoln Park," and to her, as he helped her in, "The air will do you good."

"Get one of those papers," said she.

"No," replied Jack. "It'll only stir you up."

"I reckon you're right," admitted she, rather reluctantly and with a lingering curious gaze upon the black type of the headlines. Then, the sense of her own plight sweeping over her, she sank back with a despairing wail: "Oh, what have I done? I don't want to marry Joe. I don't love him. I don't even like him any more. Why was I such a ninny! And I can't go back home— I can't!"

"No, you can't," said Jack.

"But I will," she cried angrily. "I won't marry him. I won't doit! He didn't act a bit nice while we were waiting or you. I had to sit on him— hard! I'm sure I don't see why they call him Gentleman Joe in the paper. They wouldn't if they

knew him. I think father was right about him. Oh, gracious! I forgot. You're a friend of his."

"No," said Jack.

"I'm glad of that. You wouldn't advise me to go on and marry him?"

"No," said Jack.

"Then you think I ought to go home and live it down."

"No," said Jack.

"But I've got to do one or the other."

"No," said Jack.

"Then what can I do?"

Silence.

"Prattville is a— a graveyard. And such gossips!"

"Yes," said Jack.

"But there is nothing for me to do but to go back" — this with a hopeful, questioning glance at the cool, calm, handsome profile.

Silence.

"I did think some of going on the stage."'

"No," said Jack.

"No, no, no," she mocked, half laughing, half angry. "Has the cat got your tongue?"

"No," said Jack. Now he was looking at her.

"Don't look at me so queer. What does it mean? What are you thinking about?"

"That I love you," said Jack.

Miss Morton blushed and gave her attention to the horse's ears. After a pause, she ventured timidly, "'I suppose you think I'm a worthless, flighty girl."

"Flighty," said Jack.

"You still— still—" Miss Morton could not finish.

"Yes," said Jack. "And always shall."

Another silence. "'What do you advise me to do?" inquired she.

Jack gave a faint sigh, blurted out, "Marry me."

"'Gracious!" exclaimed Miss Morton, and she sank hastily back into her corner of the hansom.

A very long silence, the hansom moving at a quiet pace along the shady drive. Then she began to laugh. "Did anything ever happen, so queer?'' she demanded. 'You were to have been best man, and now you want to marry me. I run away with one man, then a few hours later I run away with another. Then—"

"Then you marry him."

"You don't really mean that."

"Indeed I do." Candless's tongue was still recalcitrant, but his gray-blue eyes were highly eloquent, seemed bent on making up for his clumsy tongue—and more.

"You wouldn't marry a girl that had— had— done what I've done."

"I'd marry you, no matter what you did. If you hadn't— hadn't broken away, I'd never have had a chance at you."

"Why not? Oh, why didn't you say these things down home? You won't believe it, but I liked you better than any man I ever saw—honest, I did. And whert you went away, it just seemed to me like the bottom had dropped out of everything. I got so lonely I was reckless. I didn't seem to care what happened. And when Joe asked me to run away with him, I—I just up and did it."

"You will marry me?"' said Jack.

She looked at him searchingly.

Her eyes filled with tears. "Will I?" she exclaimed. "Just try me."

Jack laughed. "' You'll love me all right, all right," he said. "I'll make you the happiest woman that ever wore wedding ring."

Their eyes met. She looked long into his; then she said in a low sweet voice that made him thrill as he had never thrilled in all his life, "Yes— you will— Mr. Candless."'

"Mr. Candless!"

They both laughed. "Jack, then," said she. "You acted so grand and distant with me down home that I never dared even to think of you as— as anything but Mister."

"Do you mind if I call you Olga?"

"I'd not mind anything you did. And, do you know, it was because Joe tried to put his arm round me that I got so mad in the restaurant."

Mr. Candless took the hint. And then he kissed her— it was exactly in front of the Lincoln statue. "We'll take the train for Milwaukee now," said he, ''and be married there this evening. Is it a go?"

She nodded, eyes dancing with excitement and delight. Then, suddenly serious, "You don't think I'm altogether frivolous, do you?"

"No," said he. 'All you need is a good steady hand— light, but not too easy, and you'll go the whole race without a break."'

"That's just so," assented she emphatically. "I don't see how you ever came to understand me so well."

"A man that couldn't understand a proposition after thinking about nothing else for more than a month vouldn't be fit for much in my line," replied he.

"No, I suppose not," said she. "I've always heard that real estate takes lots of brains."

But Candless seemed not to hear unless his reckless smile was evoked by her remark. He was busy telling the driver to make a dash for the railway station. When they were aboard the train and she sank back in the great upholstered armchair in the parlor-car, Jack gave her a long strange look that made her cheeks blanch and her eyes widen.

"Yes, dear?"' she inquired breathlessly.

"It's settled now," replied he— the train had just got under way. "We go on together— to the end."'

She gave a little sigh of happiness, and repeated softly, "To— the— end."

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18: The Amateur Pirates

James Oliver Curwood

1878-1927

Cosmopolitan June 1908

THE SUN was sinking like a blood-red ball in a field of fire— as the sun should set on the eve of a sanguinary struggle at sea. So thought Rusty, captain of the *Lady Gwendolyn* and her pirate crew. The pirate-ship rested heavily in an almost motionless waste of water, but there was breeze enough partly to fill her sail and to flaunt, at the peak of the single mast, the half of a table-cloth, on which was painted bold and clear the skull and cross-bones which proclaimed her calling.

Edging up across Lake Erie an eighth of a mile away was a small, full-rigged schooner, looming picturesquely against the western sky under a dirt-gray cloud of canvas. The pirate-crew had watched her slow approach, and for a quarter of an hour Captain Rusty had stood on the sloop's cabin roof, a twisted glass which distorted shapes amazingly screwed to his right eye. About his shock of bright-red hair he had tightly bound a red bandanna, and from under this his thin, freckle-strewn face shone red and dirty. In the belt about his middle he carried a carving-knife, and in the leg of one of his boots, which were big enough for two pirates of his size, were concealed a pistol, a box of cartridges, a caseknife, and other things which were prized. The others of the *Lady Gwendolyn*, four in number, were the raggedest, dirtiest urchins that had ever sailed a ship, and for three minutes one of these had kept his eyes leveled along a piece of gas-pipe which had been fitted over the bow of the pirate-ship. At last the gunner turned about and called out in shrill disgust, "Ain't yer ever goin' t' tell me t' shoot?"

"Fi-yer-r-r-r-r-r!" yelled the captain.

With a spasmodic jerk the gunner lit a match and touched the flame to a short fuse in the end of the improvised cannon. 'Then the crew of the *Lady Gwendolyn* ducked. A moment later there came a deafening explosion, and half a pound of pebbles sang on their way to the schooner.

"Load 'er up!" shrieked Rusty, coming from cover and swinging his arms joyously. "Load 'er up!"

Two or three men ran to the rail of the passing schooner, and the pirates heard a warning voice. The gas-pipe roared in response. Never in his life had Rusty been more in his element than at this moment. But suddenly, in the middle of a yell which seemed as though it would split his throat, he choked himself off with a gasp of astonishment. There had come an unexpected tremble in the great white wings of the schooner, and while the pirate-crew stared in silent stupefaction the canvas crumbled down like melting banks of

snow, and from the vessel's side a boat shot out, filled with four of the biggest, most determined looking men that the *Lady Gwendolyn's* crew had ever seen.

"Holy Gee!" ejaculated the gunner

He looked up at the captain, but Rusty's s face was blank. A few minutes later the four seamen towed the *Lady Gwendolyn* astern of the schooner, where they tied her as a prize, and one after another the captured pirates scrambled, in all of their warlike toggery, over the side of the ship. All of this had happened almost too quickly for Rusty's comprehension. Nipped in the bud was the bloody and picturesque career which he had mapped out for himself. He was stunned, ashamed, and as he toppled over the schooner's rail, hoisted with goodnatured force by a seaman behind, he saw that he was being laughed at by half a dozen men and women gathered on the after-deck. As he scrambled to his feet and the other pirates came pouring over, a girl ran out from the little group and leveled a boxlike thing at Rusty.

"Oh, keep quiet, keep quiet— please do!" she cried. 'There! One, two, three— the light is so poor— four, five, six—" and so she counted up to a dozen, and Rusty, knowing that his picture was being taken, straightened proudly with his right hand on his hip, threw out his chest, and stood without a quiver. When the girl had done, she looked straight into his eyes, and laughed one of the prettiest laughs that Rusty had ever heard.

"Thank you!" she said.

Even in this moment of sore defeat Rusty's fertile mind reverted to his favorite pirate-hero, who had met the beautiful heroine in just this way, and he straightway fell in love with Miss Virginia Cloud, who, in company with her parents and a young man whom Rusty had not yet seen, was making a cruise of the lakes in one of her brother's ships. The pirate-captain and his crew were given quarters under an awning back of the cook's house, and there they discussed their misfortune until the cook took them into his kitchen and filled them with a supper such as they had not seen in many days. The cook was a negro, and after the meal was over he came in, grinning broadly, and carrying a basket heaped with oranges.

"Miss Virgin'y sent you these, an' sed she'd lak t' see you," he announced, nodding at Rusty.

The youthful pirate's heart thumped wildly inside his jacket. He distributed the oranges, thrust his own in one of his pockets, and rose from the table. He felt that something momentous was about to happen.

"Youse fellers go back an' lay low," he whispered as the cook turned to his work. "Don't say nothin', but be ready!"

As he went on deck he paused for a moment in the growing shadow of the caboose, fished out a cigarette from deep down in his boot-leg, lighted it and

then walked forward, where he found the girl watching the rippling sea under the bow of the slowly moving schooner. As she heard him thumping up in his heavy boots she turned, and once more she laughed me rrily in Rusty's face.

"My goodness, how fierce you look!" she cried. She held out one of her pretty, white hands, and shaking as if with the ague, Rusty thrust one of his own dirty ones into it. He saw now that the girl was very pretty. But there was something about her eves which troubled him. They were red, as though she had been crying, and Rusty thought he saw a tear halfway down her cheek.

"What's the matter?" he asked guilelessly. Something strange inside him seemed urging him to drop his cigarette, and he did. The girl saw the act, and almost hugged him up beside her.

"Nothing," she replied, yet Rusty knew that there was a tremble in her voice. "I just wanted to talk with you. Will you tell me your name?"

"I ain't got none."

"What! No name?" The girl tilted up his freckled face, and gazed squarely down into it.

"Nothin' but Rusty," he answered. He could not help looking into the girl's eyes, and he noticed that a sudden change came into them. At times Rusty had dreamed that away back in the misty past he had known such eyes as those, filled with that same gentle softness.

"No name!" repeated the girl. "And haven't you a home or— or—" She did not finish.

"Guess I had one once, but I don't know where," informed Rusty. "They had me in a orphin asyloom fer two weeks, though." He grinned, as though this fact were unusually amusing; but the girl turned her face out toward the lake and slipped an arm around his shoulders. For several minutes there was silence. In Rusty's little soul things were happening which he had never experienced before. For the time he forgot that he was a pirate. He could not remember ever having had a woman's arm around him like this, and unconsciously he snuggled closer to the girl.

"Rusty," she said suddenly, "would you like to escape?"

The question almost took the boy's breath away; it brought him back to the realization of being a captured pirate. Ina flood his old ambitions returned to him, but they were almost immediately replaced by the desire to remain with the girl. He wanted to tell her this, and was just beginning when she interrupted him.

"Would you like to escape, to-night, and take me with you?"

Filled with joy, Rusty replied that he would. Then, with her head bent down very near to his, Miss Virginia described her plans. When she had done, the piratecaptain straightened, almost bursting with the great secret she had

confided to him. At that moment a man came and stood within a few feet of them. He was a young man, and he held his hat in his hand. But the girl had turned. Her chin was high in the air, her lips were closed very tightly, and Rusty wondered what was the matter. Ina moment the young man turned and slowly walked away.

"Who's dat guy?" asked Rusty.

"He? Oh, just a man," replied the girl. Under a sudden impulse she faced Rusty and put both her arms around him. "I want you to promise me one thing, Rusty. You won't go near im, will you?"

"You bet I won't, if you don't want me to!" said the boy.

Miss Virginia bent down and pressed her warm lips upon one of Rusty's dirty cheeks, and for an hour after that the pirate-captain could think of nothing much beyond this soft caress. He went back to his crew under the canvas awning, but not until the evening was well advanced did he tell them of the venturesome work in store for them that night. For a time the pirates amused themselves by playing cards in the light of a deck-lantern. Then they doubled up back in the shadows, and still later Rusty crept out cautiously and going to the girl's cabin knocked lightly on the door. In a moment it was partly opened, and the pirate-captain slipped in.

"You're a little early, Rusty." The girl had been writing, and held a pen in her hand. The boy's enthusiasm was subdued by the whiteness of her face.

"Sit down," she said, with a little smile that made Rusty fear she was losing courage. "I'll be ready in a minute." After a few moments she turned to him again. "Hadn't you better get your men in the boat?" she asked. "I'll be there by that time."

After Rusty had gone she slowly read over the pages she had written:

DEAR Mama:

Please don't be frightened when you read this. To-night I am helping the boys to escape, and I am going with them. You know why, but I want you to tell father and Captain Marks that I did it just for a little fun. You'll do this, won't you? Mr. Brown is our guest, and it would embarrass him if the others knew about the affair. It is almost unnecessary to say that he came to me again this afternoon. I was perfectly fair with him, but he was too stubborn for anything. In other words, he said point-blank that I would have to give up my idea of studying operatic music, that he did not want a wife whose interests were divided between home and the stage. At that I slipped off my engagement ring, and then— well, he took it and walked away. I never want to see him again, and I want you to please tell him so. The boys will put me ashore, and I will take a train for the Soo, where I will rejoin you. HE, of course, will have sense enough to leave the boat at Detroit. Now please don't worry, mama. In haste,

VIRGINIA.

P.S. Of course you know I intended to do as Dick wished. But when he said I must I said I wouldn't, and now I never will!

The girl sealed the letter, addressed it to her mother, and placed it on her dresser where it would be seen in the morning. Then she put on a hat and a light coat, and with a dressing-bag in her hand slipped quietly out of her cabin into the gloomy stern of the ship. By their united strength Rusty and his pirates had worked the Lady Gwendolyn in until her stub of a bowsprit rubbed against the schooner's rudder, but even then the passage down seemed a perilous one to the girl. Rusty was waiting for her with a length of rope in his hands.

"We'll git y' down in a jiffy!" he said encouragingly. "I'll tie this rope under yer arms and ease y' down that way. See?" He showed her how the trick was to be done, and was so eager in his work that he did not notice a dark form stealing toward him in the shadow of the bulwark. As Miss Virginia was lowered into the sloop this figure paused, as if undecided whether to approach nearer or to retreat.

"Ahoy, down there!" hissed Rusty, when he knew that his passenger was safely aboard. "Lay to'n' be ready! I'll be back in a minit!"

Into his head had come a daring thought. The piratical blood was surging through his veins again, and now, as he turned and crept stealthily back, his eyes were open wide for plunder. Rusty was not a thief. If a boy ashore had accused him of being such he would have fought, and fought hard. But he was a pirate, and to a pirate all things of value are legitimate plunder. Near the cook's cabin was a big coil of rope, and very cautiously Rusty dragged this across the deck. Suddenly he heard a noise behind him, and, turning, he saw a figure between him and the stern. The spirit of a man came into Rusty. He saw that the situation demanded action, and reaching down into his boot-leg he pulled out his revolver, sneaked up as quietly as a cat, and shov ed the weapon close up under the nose of the young man against whom the girl had warned him that evening. "Hands up, mister!"

The man obeyed. In the darkness Rusty could not see that he was laughing silently, despite the fact that the revolver was within a few inches of his face.

"Don't shoot!" he begged. "Don't shoot! I'll go with you."

Rusty's heart throbbed with delight. Here was a prisoner, perhaps a valuable one, instead of a coil of rope. Visions of a ransom filled his brain. In a shrill voice that trembled with excitement he commanded his prisoner to walk into the stern and climb down into the sloop. He was even more delighted with the alacrity with which the man obeyed. It was so dark that the pirates below could not see who was coming down, and Rusty did not inform them until he was among them himself. After he had cut the tow-line he w hispered the story of his capture. Without a word the prisoner had seated himself. The girl

was in the bow, a dozen feet away, concealed in darkness and unconscious of what had occurred.

"Is that you, Rusty?" she called in a low voice.

"Yes," replied the captain. "Don't anybody make a move until the schooner's out of hearin'," he added w arningly, and for a few minutes there was "a deep silence aboard the sloop. Slowly the schooner's lights grew more and more. distant, and at last Rusty ordered the *Lady Gwendolyn*'s sail hoisted, and a lantern brought from the little cabin. He was eager for the girl and his prisoner to see him as a captain in active command. While still enveloped in darkness he transferred his weapons from his boot-leg to the belt about his waist. Then he stood up square and stiff on the cabin roof just above his prisoner's head, and as one of the pirates came up behind him with the light he placed a hand over his eyes and stared tragically out into the blackness of the night. In a moment the sloop was dimly illuminated. Rusty heard a sharp, sudden little scream, then a man's voice calling a name— just once. After that there was silence. Still the pirate-captain stared out over the lake. It delighted him to think that his attitude had startled the girl and the prisoner; he tilted himself perilously over the edge of the boat, one hand surreptitiously sought his revolver as if he detected approaching danger, then "Brute!"

Surely that name had not been applied to him! He regained his proper equilibrium with a jerk. The man had partly risen, with his hands stretched out toward the bow. Up there sat the girl. Rusty wondered what she was looking at. She seemed staring at least six feet above his head, her lips set tightly, her hands clenched in her lap. He looked up, but saw nothing of interest. Then he looked at the man again. It occurred to him now that the girl had warned him against this man. She feared him; possibly he had done her some great wrong, or was planning to hurt her. Determinedly he drew a bead on the back of the prisoner's head.

"Set down'r I'll blow yer 'ead off!" he yelled.

The man turned, smiled up at Rusty, and sat down. Still holding his cocked revolver menacingly, Rusty approached the girl. She looked at him sternly, with a peculiar gleam in her eyes that Rusty had not seen before.

"Didn't I ask you not to tell *him*?"

"I didn't," replied the pirate-captain in a whisper. " 'E was goin' to squeal on us, an' I bagged 'im! 'E's a prisoner!" He pronounced the last words with a tragic emphasis.

Despite herself, the girl smiled. But Rusty was a barrier between herself and the man.

"I wish you could get rid of him in some way, Rusty," she murmured. There was an appealing look in her eyes, and the boy's face became very sober. He

walked back and whispered among his men. After a little they approached the prisoner and coolly proceeded to tie his hands and feet. The man looked at the girl and laughed, but this time she had turned her back toward him. Soon she heard a noise which grew suspiciously louder until out of curiosity she glanced over her shoulder. The five pirates had dragged their helplessly bound prisoner to the edge of the sloop, and he was already halfway over when she shrieked out Rusty's name.

"What are you doing?" she cried.

"Gettin' rid of im!" shouted Rusty. "Now, men,one, two—"

"Stop!" she screamed. " Rusty You're a—you're a—" She stopped, but Rusty knew that he was in disgrace.

"A clever joke!" growled the man "a blamed clever joke!"

Rusty knew that there was some good reason why he should free his prisoner, and he did so. For a long time after that he kept very quiet. Two or three times the man spoke to the girl, but she deigned no reply. At last she called to Rusty, and the boy crept up to her, feeling that he had lost all favor in her eyes; but she reached out and put an arm around him, and the pirate-captain felt as though he would burst with joy.

"Rusty, where are we going?" she asked.

"I dunno," he replied. "We're just sailin'. We might hit land any time."

"I know, but what land may we hit?" Rusty became nervous. He clawed at the rotten rail of the sloop, and wondered if he had better guess something at random.

"I— I ain't sure," he said truthfully. "Mebby we're goin' t'ward Canada, mebby we're goin' t'ward— what's that United States state off there?" He pointed, and the girl told him that it was Ohio.

"Well, mebby we'll hit that!" he concluded hopefully.

For a long time after that Miss Virginia sat very still, her face turned out to the darkness of the lake ahead, and Rusty tried hard to picture in his mind the things she might be thinking about. Her arm was still around him, and that gave him some comfort.

"You— you're mad?" he dared to whisper at last.

"Just a little, Rusty," she replied. "But not at you," she quickly added, with a re-assuring pressure of her arm. Rusty felt that she was going to say something more to him soon, and he waited patiently, peering up into her face now and then.

"You wouldn't shoot, ever, would you, Rusty?" she asked.

"No-oo-oo-oo," replied Rusty doubtfully.

Miss Virginia gave a relieved sigh. "I'm so glad," she said. "I wouldn't have you hurt him, but—"

"But what?" urged Rusty, after waiting for a moment.

"When we reach land I want you to get him away from me. I don't want him to be near me or know where I go. Will you?" Rusty said that he would, and during the next hour he invented a scheme so big that he could hardly hold it. Once, filled with a knowledge of his power, he came up close to his prisoner and grinned sardonically in his face. The night passed tediously after this— at least to the girl and the man. The girl especially was becoming more and more miserable. She begged Rusty to find out from the man what time it was, and inwardly prayed that something would happen soon to relieve the situation. A little before dawn her prayer was answered. Warning first came in a slight jar and a scraping under the *Lady Gwendolyn* as though she were passing over drifting brush. Then came a jolt which flung the girl to the bottom of the sloop, and above her cry of alarm there sounded a shrill yell of terror from one of the pirates as he was hurled head foremost into the lake. The man had half gathered the girl in his arms when the boy who had been flung overboard stuck his head over the edge of the boat.

"Land ho!" he yelled lustily.

"Where 'way?" cried Rusty.

"We're on it!" informed the partly submerged pirate. "I'm standin' on bottom now."

Rusty saw the girl struggling with his prisoner, but before he could lend her assistance she had freed herself. The man said something which he could not understand, then turned and jumped into the lake. The pirate-captain could hear him splashing on his way to the shore.

"He's gone!" he said. There was a note of disappointment in his voice as he saw the end of the great achievement which he had planned.

"I'm glad, Rusty," replied the girl. "Now, how am I going to get ashore?"

"Wade," advised Rusty promptly. "It ain't over yer head!"

To prove his assertion he dropped over the side, and found the water only up to his armpits. "You afraid?" he asked.

"Noo-o-o-o-o," said the girl hesitatingly, "but—"

"You needn't undress," comforted the pirate-captain.

Miss Virginia laughed, and the man ashore, hearing her merriment, swore to himself as he strode up from the beach.

"I'll have to change my clothes afterward, Rusty. If you'll be very careful, and will carry this bag without getting it wet, I'll follow you."

Rusty reached up for the bag and waded ashore with it. Immediately after him came the girl, and after her trailed all of the pirates but one, who remained behind to care for the Lady Gwendolyn. Then Rusty and his men went a dozen rods up the beach and built a big fire out of driftwood. By the

time it was burning well the girl rejoined them, wearing a beautiful, clinging, creamy dress that made Rusty stare in openmouthed admiration. She went straight up to him and gave him a hug.

"Dear Rusty," she cried, "you're a— you're a brick! And every one of your men is a—brick!" She knew that word expressed worlds to Rusty. Then she went from pirate to pirate and kissed each of them, and thanked them so beautifully for all that they had done for her that they were ready to get down and eat sand for her if she requested it. After a little, one of the pirates went out into the dim dawn and returned not many minutes afterward with the information that they were wrecked "on a island no bigger'n Grand Circus Park," which meant that there were about half a dozen acres in it.

In the firelight the girl's face showed her alarm. "I know! It must be Middle Sister Island!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Rusty!" There was a sob in her voice. "There isn't a soul on it, and nobody ever comes here! Oh, dear— dear— dear!" Rusty knew that she was really crying now, with her face buried in her arms, and he gulped hard two or three times and silently beckoned his men away. He knew what was the matter, too. She was afraid of the man. He told his men this, and he revealed other things to them. Then he signaled the other pirate from the *Lady Gwendolyn*, and all of them went out as silently as shadows in a search for the escaped prisoner. In Rusty's great scheme force was not to play a large part, for he had reasoned that the man would be more than their equal, unless he shot him, and that he had promised the girl not todo. He would lie to him. He would tell him that the girl wished to talk with him, but that he and his men would allow him to go near the girl only as a prisoner, with his hands securely tied behind his back. After the man's arms were helpless Rusty was sure that he would be an easy prey. Then he would inform him that the girl never wanted to see him again, and that he and his crew were therefore doing their duty.

The girl had raised her tear-stained face just in time to see Captain Rusty and his men disappear. She knew that they were not deserting her, so she sat beside the fire and cried and shivered and laughed by turns, until the day came in a ribbon of red over the lake. Then the pirates returned. One of them was limping grievously, and his dirty face had been cleansed in streaks by many tears. Shamefacedly Rusty showed one closed and swollen eye and an upper lip that bulged. But there was something in his manner which spoke of triumph.

"We hed a scrap," he explained, his articulation a little thick because of the condition of his lip. He did not know that the girl misunderstood him. She looked from the limping, tear-stained pirate to Rusty's battered countenance, and mentally concluded that the two had engaged in a combat.

"You shouldn't fight," she reproved, trying to keep a sober face. But the humor of the situation overcame her, and she smiled. Rusty was delighted. He could see that she was already greatly relieved at being freed of the man.

"We done 'im good an' plenty this time!" he further elucidated, edging up to her confidentially.

"We!" exclaimed the girl, looking pityingly at the other injured pirate, who was standing almost entirely upon one leg and grinning cheerfully. "We, did you say? How many of you attacked him?"

"The hull of us!" said Rusty. He could not account for the girl's silence. He expected some words of approbation, and not receiving them soon turned his attention to the stranded sloop. Some weeks previously the pirates had resurrected the *Lady Gwendolyn* from a mud-bar where for several years she had been allowed to rot and warp. There was not a sound board in her, and in the collision with the shore she had crushed in a half of her bottom. Undismayed by the loss of their craft, the pirates whistled and shouted in the joy of their adventure as they brought their stores ashore and piled them near the dying fire. Captain Rusty's provisions began with a peck of potatoes and ended with an emaciated strip of bacon.

For a time the girl watched the pirates' operations with interest. Then she strolled slowly along the beach, looking sharply to guard against an encounter with the man, whom she still desired to evade. She wondered where he had gone. From a point which she soon gained she could see down both sides of the island, but he was not in sight. Her curiosity became acute. She continued her walk until she had entirely encompassed the island. Rusty had roasted a few potatoes and fried some bacon, and the choicest of the fare he had placed on a tin plate for the girl.

"We're goin' to build a raft," he informed her soon after. "When we get it built we'll go out there 'n' be picked up."

He pointed out over the lake where, two or three miles away, a trail of smoke marked the ships' highway. All that morning the pirates worked like beavers. By noon the raft was completed. With ropes and wire taken from the sloop, pieces of wreckage and driftwood had been fastened together, and in the center of the crude craft had been erected a short mast bearing a part of the Lady Gwendolyn's sail. All of this Rusty proudly pointed out to Miss Virginia.

"And do you expect me to ride on that, Rusty?" she asked.

"Sure not!" replied the pirate-captain. "We're going out there 'n' stop a ship. Then we'll come back 'n' resky you." He spoke with confidence, and in watching their embarkation the girl forgot that she was being left aione with the man. Not until the pirates were well out did she think of this, and then she

screamed to Rusty and waved frantically for him to return. Rusty seemed to comprehend, for his voice came back in a faint but cheerful shout:

"He won't hurt y', Miss Virgin'y. We've settled fer him!"

The girl wondered what he meant. She was not alarmed at first because she knew that the man was big enough to care for himself. But as the afternoon passed and the raft became only a speck out in the lake, a fear that something had really happened to her lover began to possess her. If the man had suddenly appeared and had held out his arms to her, she would have gone into them promptly. Her pique had partly disappeared at breakfast that morning. It was entirely gone now. She longed for her adventure to come to an end, and with only the lonesomeness of the lake about her and that silent, mysterious bit of wilderness behind her, fear came quickly where before there had been anger and defiance. And soon after the sky darkened until it was almost as gloomy as at evening. An occasional lightning flash streaked the sky. Up out of the south came the distant rumbling of thunder. The girl wanted to cry aloud, but something seemed to command her not to break the heavy silence that preceded the storm, so she only sobbed as she hurried around the island again. She thought of the pirates, and prayed that some ship would pick them up before the wind came. Then she looked up fearfully at the black growth of trees in the center of the island, in which handfuls of wind flung out by the approaching tempest made mournful, thrilling sounds. Up there was her lover. Perhaps he was dead. She drew nearer until she stared wild-eyed into a thickness that was fast growing black.

"Dick!" she called softly. "Dick! Dick!" She parted a mass of bushes. One step, two, three, and she was enveloped in the gloom. Almost above her head the sky opened in a panel of fire, and there came after it a rumble of thunder that seemed to jar the earth under her feet. For a time there was silence so absolute that she could hear her heart beat.

"Dick! Dick! Where are you?"

She went in deeper. Foot by foot she penetrated, trembling, listening, until she could not tell from which direction she had come. She stumbled between rocks, she scratched her face and hands on thorncovered vines, and then she came to an open spot. In the edge of that opening was the man. He was sitting with his back against a sapling, behind which his hands were tied. In front of him was a swaying bush, and suspended from the bush by means of a string was a chunk of bacon, at which the man was pecking like a bird. He was maneuvering for a nibble when the girl saw him. She stood for an instant as silent as the rocks about her. Then she ran to him.

"Dick! I've found you! Thank God, I've found you!" And her arms were around him.

THE NEXT afternoon the girl and the man came close down to where the remnants of the *Lady Gwendolyn* lay scattered upon the beach. A quarter of a mile out a sail was bearing down upon the island. It was a trim little yacht, with canvas as white as snow; brass glittered along her gunwale, a long pennant fluttered at her peak, and suddenly, as she luffed under a gust of wind, a large square flag filled out below it. Boldly designed upon this was the skull and crossbones!

"I told you we could depend upon Rusty," said the girl.

The pirate-captain was first ashore. He was very sober when he saw the man, but the girl met him with open arms.

"It's all right, Rusty," she said, hugging him to her. "There's been an awful big mistake, dear, and when you take us ashore I'm going to marry him! And, Rusty"— she hugged the astonished little fellow tighter— "you're going to be our boy now, forever and forever! "

"And we'll get you a bigger and better ship than any you ever had, Rusty," the man added. "But, tell me, boy, where did you get that boat?"

The last spark of piracy in Rusty rose for a moment triumphant. He straightened with a bit of his old pride.

"We cut 'er out!" he said briefly.

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19: The Jonah Woman

Vernon Ralston

fl 1907-1921

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THERE'S SIGNS and signs of luck, said the old captain, most of 'em signs of bad luck when you come to think of it. There's folks who say it's unlucky to have a parson as passenger— that's nonsense. I'd no trouble through 'em, except their squabbling about who'll read the service on Sundays, and making me do it myself. Why, on my record passage to Calcutta, we'd thirteen missionaries aboard; you'd have thought that would have brought bad luck if anything would.

But I'm not denying that there are Jonahs. One of the worst voyages I had, there was a passenger arrested as he stepped ashore at Calcutta. You'll remember the Tedford-square poisoning case; well, he was hung for that. Never did I understand the ill-luck we had that trip till I saw the police nab him.

But worse than a Jonah man is a Jonah woman. I never had one aboard but once, and a fool I was to take ber, for I knew it. If I'd only had pluck enough to follow my own judgment and not been afraid of what my owners might say she'd never have set foot aboard ship of mine.

It was when I was in command of the old *Hercules*— fastest boat on the London, Cape, and Calcutta service she was then, though people would laugh at her 15 knots nowadays. Well, we were in dock being overhauled between voyages, when I was told that the head of the firm wanted to see me on important business. I went up at once to their office, and there old Mr. Rimmer was sitting with a lady.

"This is the captain of the *Hercules*," said old Rimmer; "Captain Holden— the Honorable Mrs. Anson. Now, captain, I want you to take Mrs. Anson to the Hercules and let her choose the best deck cabin. Mr. Anson is unfortunately an invalid, and has been ordered a long voyage for the benefit of his health. Do evervthing in your power, captain, to make Mr. and Mrs. Anson comfortable."

Now, just then Mrs. Anson turned and looked me straight in the face. She was a thundering pretty woman, with her coal black hair and a pink and white complexion, but, nevertheless, I didn't like the look of her. Somehow she made me feel uncomfortable. There was a hard, cruel look in her eye that gave me the shivers. It came over me at once that she'd bring no luck aboard.

"Well, Mr. Rimmer," I said, "I don't know that the *Hercules* is really the best ship for an invalid. Now, the Athens, sailing a fortnight later, rolls far less.

"Stuff and nonsense," said old Rimmer sharply; "the cabins on the *Athens* aren't half the size. Mr. Anson must have a big cabin. The *Hercules* is a long

way our best vessel. Now take Mrs. Anson aboard and see that she and her husband are really well looked after."

I couldn't say anything more, so I took Mrs. Anson down to the ship and showed her our accoriimodation. At the time it struck me that she was thinking far more of her own comfort than of her invalid husband's. She put 20 questions about things which concerned her to one she asked about things that mattered to him. And all the time she was sort of making eyes at me. Not that she was taken with me at all— I could read her well enough for that—but she was the kind of woman who must flirt with the nearest available man.

When our passengers came aboard week later I was shocked to see Mr. Anson. He was far gone in consumption, and didn't look to me as if he would last more than a day or two. His wife came with him, but that was all you could say in her favor. His servant had to see about settling the poor chap in his cabin. She was too busy trying to get to know from the purser what military men were likely to be passengers that trip.

We had a fair crowd of passengers that time. The usual lot of military men and civil servants returning from furlough, a few commercial people, two or three girls travelling out under my care to their parents at Calcutta, and a missionary or so.

Our bad luck began almost at once. Weld an engine break down in the Downs, and it took, a couple of days to put it right. Then we'd fog right down the Channel, and it only cleared after we'd rounded Ushant. I'd been praying for it to clear, yet when it did clear I was sorry. We just seemed to run into one patch of bad weather after another. Never had I such a passage through the Bay of Biscay. The first officer and myself were worn out with our day and night work on the bridge. I hadn't time to see how Mr. Anson was going on; but the doctor told me that, what with his disease and seasickness, he was on the verge of death all the time.

My first officer said to me one night on deck. "We've bad luck this voyage, sir."

I answered sharply, "What do you expect when we've a Jonah woman and a passenger who's half a corpse aboard?"

The words slipped out,. and I saw that the man at the wheel heard them. Still, I thought that the stupid shellback would take no notice.

All this time the Jonah woman was as well as possible. Every other woman on board, except a stewardess or so, was knocked over by seasickness, but she never missed a meal. It wasn't often during the first week of the voyage that I could contrive to take any of my meals in the saloon with the passengers. But on the few occasions I was there I always found Mrs. Anson grinning and smirking at the men.

However, at last our luck turned, and we had some decent weather. I'd time to think of something else besides the ship's course. Directly I could give an eye to the passengers I found that Mrs. Anson was flirting hard with at least three men aboard.

There was Captain Pierce, of the Indian Guides; a fellow named Pratt, who was a deputy-collector somewhere in Bengal; and an indigo planter named Graham. They were fetching and carrying for her all day long, walking up and down the deck with her in the evenings, and, for aught I knew, kissing and cuddling her in corners.

Now, it's hard for a ship's captain to interfere in social matters. If people kept the rules of the ship I could do nothing except show that I was disgusted. It made me sick to think of that poor fellow coughing his life away in his cabin, whilst his wife was amusing herself by making three men jealous of one hnother.

Anyhow, every day I used to call in and try arid cheer up' poor Anson a bit. Well, one evening I dropped in to chat with him as usual and found Stevens, the ship's doctor, there. The poor fellow was coughing horribly, and Stevens was doing his best to help him get his breath between the fits. Suddenly there came one worse fit than usual, and before I could quite understand what was happening Anson died.

Stevens turned to me— "He's gone— I told I Mrs. Anson yesterday that I apprehended a crisis."

I forgot the dead man.

"Then why the dickens isn't she here?" I shouted.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "Will you break the news to her, captain?"

"I will," I said, and strode right away to where the passengers were sitting under the awning on tiie deck.

As I came up I heard Mrs. Anson's voice. She was talking to the circle of men around her about a fancy dress ball that they intended to hold aboard. "Of course, as I'm a decided brunette. I shall have to go as 'Night.' " Then she saw me listening and said, "That will suit me, won't it, captain?"

I said gruffly, "There'll be no fancy dress ball aboard this ship, madam."

"How cruel of you, captain. What's your reason ? Are you such a Puritan that you disapprove of dancing?"

"There are lots of things I disapprove of, madam: but my real reason is. that your husband is lying dead in his cabin."

She was taken by surprise and could not quite control herself for half a second. Like a flash a sort of joyful look passed across her face. The next

second she was sobbing with her face in her handkerchief, and crying, "Oh, my poor George, take me to him."

I didn't offer my services, as Pratt and Graham rushed forward to escort the heartbroken widow. I walked away, disgusted with the lot of them. Even in the presence of death they could hardly conceal their rivalry.

A minute later I heard someone call me. I looked round and saw that it was Captain Pierce.

"What do you want?" I said, not in too polite a tone.

"Captain," he said, "did she know that her husband was dying?"

"The doctor told her so yesterday."

He gave kind of gesture of horror and then said, "I'd no idea the poor fellow was so ill, or—" he paused for a little.

"Or you wouldn't have carried on so with his wife," I added.

"That is so. I did wrong, and I'm confoundedly sorry for it. Did you see her face when you told her? She couldn't hide her joy just at the first."

"There's nothing to prevent you marrying her now," I said.

"Marry her— after what I saw?"

"Well, you're well rid of her, then. I wish the ship was as well rid of this Jonah woman."

"Why do you call her that?"

"Because there'll he no luck for this ship or anyone in it till she is out of it."

Well, Captain Pierce kept his word. When I'd read the service over poor Anson and we'd dropped him overboard other men might go and sympathise with the handsome widow, but Captain Pierce kept away. She was making eyes at him all the time she-was spooning with Graham and Pratt; but he took no notice of her and only spoke when civility absolutely compelled him.

I hated the Jonah woman more and more as the voyage went on. I could fairly feed my teeth grit as she went past me. All her complimentary references to "our good captain" were thrown away on me.

What is more, I noticed that the men kept away from her too. All the seamen gave her a wide berth, and I guessed that one of them had been talking, and that they'd got my idea about the Jonah woman.

Well, we'd rounded the Cape and were making a fair voyage of it, when one day the chief engineer came to me and reported that one of his boilers was leaking. It would take at least a day to put it right he said. It had to be done, so I reluctantly told him to draw his fires. Happily the weather was dead calm, so it did not matter that we could not get steerage way or the vessel.

The passengers seemed aggravated to find the ship lying like a log for a day. The tedium of the voyage seemed to grow on them now that we were not moving at all. I hate to see a set of .discontented passengers, and told my first

officer to do anything in his power to amuse them on that roasting day. It was just an hour before sunset that he came to me.

"Some of the men have been asking me, sir, if they, could have a tarpaulin hung from the side of the ship for them to bathe in."

"Have a boat handy," I said, "to see that none of the fools slip off and drown themselves. Otherwise they can't come to any harm in this dead calm."

I went down to my cabin and was writing up my log. I could hear the passengers splashing and skylarking alongside; I was thinking as I wrote that perhaps they'd be less fidgety the next day, when suddenly I heard an awful shriek and a rush of feet I to the side of the deck.

Like a flash I jumped up the companion stairs.

I saw Captain Pierce in the boat safely, but the tarpaulin was all bedabbled with blood.

What's the matter?" I cried.

"Sharks," came the answer, "two of them— they rushed the tarpaulin suddenly and seized Pratt and Graham."

I saw two tracks of blood on the surface of the water.

"Lower another boat," I shouted, "and you in that boat follow one of those tracks. Perhaps the brutes will come to the surface with their prey."

We rowed about for an hour, but could find no trace of the missing men. Then reluctantly I gave the order to return to the ship.

As the men bent to their oars I heard one of them munnur to another, "That's two she's got besides her husband."

"What's that?" I cried.

The man looked frightened, and then blurted out, "The Jonah woman; sir."

"Don't talk infernal nonsense about the passengers," I said. "The first man I hear say a word about it I'll clap in irons for the rest of the voyage."

I hoped that I had checked the talk; but from the significant way in which the sailors looked at one another, I feared that the idea was firmly settled in their minds. I went to see Captain Pierce directly I got on board. He was a brave man— his army record proved that— but he was shivering with fear.

"Not hurt?" I asked.

"No," he said, "the brute's nose just grazed my leg." Then he added significantly, "I'm luckier than Pratt or Graham."

FROM that time forward the Jonah woman was left almost alone— the whisperings of the crew had reached the passengers. She walked to and fro and made eyes at all the men in her usual way, but people fought very shy of her. As for the sailors, they'd rather have forfeited their pay for the voyage than let even her shadow pass over them.

I scarcely left the deck for the remainder of that voyage. I tell you navigation is no joke with a woman like that aboard. However, somehow we managed to make headway, and at last we knew that the next day we should be in the Hooghly. All at onee a thick tropical mist swept down on us from the Summerbunds. We couldn't see half a ship's length ahead. There wasn't a star visible. I was on the bridge as nervous as a cat, trying with my night-glass to see what was ahead. The engines were going dead slow, and we were just groping our way forward. Then all at once J heard a steamer's siren ahead; a minute later there came another whistle from our port side; then some vessel to starboard burnt a flare. It seemed to me as if all the ships in the sea were blundering round that night. Our siren was going every half-minute, we'd all hands on deck on the look-out— yet in that clammy mist I never felt sure for a minute that we wouldn't have something aboard us.

All at once we heard the sound of a screw; before we could make out where it came from a steamer passed right athwart our bows, missing us not by 6 ft. There came a great shouting from the men on deck, an answering shout from the vessel that had so nearly sunk us, and we were left alone in the fog. Then I heard, a hoarse voice cry, "We're done, all of us— that Jonah woman'll sink us to-night."

"Throw her overboard," shouted someone else, and I heard the scurry of feet.

I leapt from the bridge, for you don't know what shell-backs will do when they are half-wild with fear.

"Get to the bridge," I called to the first ofiicer, as I hurried towards the deckcabins. I pulled out my revolver as I ran and reached the cabin door just in time.

I had scarcely got there when a mob of half-mad sailors rushed up. "Throw her over!" they cried.

"Get back," I shouted; "I'll shoot the first man that stirs."

They would not have kept back— I saw that in their faces. But just then there came a great crash. In the fog a steamer had struck us right amidships. Its jib boom swept away our bulwarks and crashed into the deck-cabins. I heard the other captain shout to reverse his engines, and slowly the ship drew away from us.

Then as I turned to look at the shattered deck-cabin I saw the Jonah woman— or, rather, what was once the Jonah woman. The heavy boom bad struck her on the head and— well, she wasn't a pleasant object to look at. Directly the men saw that she was dead they set up a cheer.

Would you believe it that five minutes afterwards the mist swept away like a dream, and we'd the quickest run I'd ever known up the Hooghly. The

collision hadn't even started a plate on board my ship. Bar a few yards of smashed bulwark and the wrecked deck-cabins, there was no harm done that a few pots of paint wouldn't put right. Our luck turned the minute the Jonah woman was dead.

You may call it superstition if you like— landsmen know a sight more about seafaring than sailors. But if ever you'd been a voyage with a Jonah woman, you'd pray heaven that you'd never have another.

———————————

20: Service

George Manning-Sanders

1881-1953

Australian Worker (Sydney) 7 March 1923

British artist who later turned to writing, produced three novels, some plays, and numerous short stories.

WHEN the united efforts of his wife Bessie, and his fellow fishermen, had convinced the relutant Nat that he rrally was too old, and too unfit to go to sea any more, the old man would sit day after day before his cottage, yearning and unhappy. All those passing up and down the slipway felt sorry for Nat and stayed to give sympathy.

'You're all right; boy,' said the young man who had lately married the retired fisherman's niece. 'It may seem a bit strange at first like, but you'll come used to it, never fear.'

'I've been away on that,' said the old man, waving his hand toward the gleaming water, 'since I can remember, and what's there to "come to" me but one thing that a man properly don't belong to have time to think on?'

'You've memory,' said the young man, smiling dreamily.

Nat shook his head. 'I was never one for thinking backward. I'm all for forward doings, I am.'

This conversation being reported to Bessie, she took counsel with various neighbors, who all agreed that Nat was I fretting to his grave.

'You best have the doctor to 'un,' said one.

So the doctor. came. He was a young man with a few simple theories; one of his theories was the restorative power of costly wine. He prescribed a bottle for the fretting old fisherman.

'Think of it, missis, and me with me lips never nigh the bottle stuff in me | life,' said the delighted Nat, turning over the scrap of paper with the Illegible, name of the wine scrawled on it. 'And like enough it'll cost shillings, eh?'

'It'll be cheaper than doctor's stuff, most like, and more comfortable to the tongue,' said Bessie.

But when she went to the market town to buy the wine the cost of it was a shock to her. She carried it home, devising schemes to hide the cost by half. But she couldn't, and that evening, as the bottle stood oh the table while Nat straightened a rusty corkscrew, she blurted the truth.

'It'll be like drinking money, missis,' he said, staring at the wine in awe. 'Must be powerful stuff to be priced so high.'

Drawing the cork was; a ceremony. Drinking the two small glasses night and morning was a ceremony. It was a sad day for Nat when only a drop of the wine could be poured into his glass.

'I'll keep the bottle out of gratitude, so I will,' he said, with the flavor of those last drops on his tongue.

The next day Nat had his inspiration. He would make that clear glass bottle magnificent; a thing to be talked of and marvelled at by all men, long after he had passed from the ways of men. Yes, he would build a ship in it, not a trick ship that could be pushed through the neck of the bottle and unfolded, but a ship with a cork hull built inside those glass walls.

Before the thought had fully matured, the old man was. feverishly searching for pieces of cork, wire, bamboo and stick.

In a year and a half the semblance of a rigged ship lay within thei bottle, and Nat's eyes were red with the minute difficulties of putting her there, and his fingers were scarred by the incautious use of the red-hot wires that helped in the fashioning. Brightly dressed, high-voiced visitors stopped to watch; heavy-breathing children would fill the doorway in those months of failure and triumph, till the little ship undeniably rode at anchor in the safe harborage of glass, and every failure and every success and every fragment of that ship had its history, and Nat delighted to tell it, always concluding with a loving glance at the crooked little vessel.

'Yes, there she is. I've made a marvei, though I says it as shouldn't, and come by and by it'll be the talk of all men how I done it.'

No one was allowed to touch the treasure but himself, for Bessie was failing; her interest in ornaments had passed from her.

A week after her death, Nat, coming down late in the morning, was stupefied to find the corner of the mantelpiece empty. He turned startled eyes to his niece, a question fluttering on his lips.

'Broke it.' she said, indignantly. 'No, I've not broke it, and no more have Bobby been playing with it neither; he's proper toys he has. I must have put it outside along with the other gear when I was clearing iip, and seems so as if I'd forgot to bring it in again.' She came back not so much concerned as she should have been, to tell a casual tale of a rag-and-bone man who had been shouting near.

'They picks up things when there's none about,' she said indifferently.

Nat started in pursuit with one stick to help him. Before long he had to borrow another. Many had seen the man, but none had noted the direction of his going from the village. The old man set off on the highroad, footsore, bewildered, fearful that he would never again see his treasure. At dusk he

came upon the rag-and-bone man leaving a wayside house, a sack on his shoulder, the bottle with the imprisoned ship held carelessly under his arm.

'This old thing!' said the man, when Nat had. blurted his claim. 'Well, you can have it and welcome, boy,' and don't you leave it dallying about in the street no more; bitter rigs I've had with he to-day, trying to raise a few coppers. "How wonderful," says they. "How much will you give for it?" says I. "Oh, it's no use," says they. And an old gent in that house I've just left got fair angry over it; said it gave him a proper headache to see a good bottle used so.' He lit a match and peered at the swaying masts of the little wreck.

'She wasn't meant to be carried, careless,' said Nat in a shaking voice. 'But that bit of looseness don't matter. I've always had it in me mind to put more work about her.'

For a few months after that Nat probed and prodded into the bottle.

On the day that his niece found him cold with the bottle beside him, she noted, without interest, that the glass was cracked. She handed the bottle down to her infant son, and her infant son spent a happy hour in filling the bottle with earth and water.

21: The Caulfield Cup Bluff

Edward Woodward

1882-1951

Western Mail (Perth) 1 Aug 1929

Crime and thriller writer, not to be confused with movie and TV actor Edward Woodward (1930-2009). This story takes place in Melbourne, Australia.

UNTIL RECENTLY, George Rudland, thirty-five, and of pretty casual bearing, had been a comparatively wealthy man, but a disastrous slump in Malay Tin a month previous had put him where nature puts the barnacle-on the rocks.

Sitting at the breakfast table, he gutted the envelopes of his morning mail with the air of a man who knows the worst. Presently he came to a letter which brought a glitter to his eyes. He read it with tightened lips, and then tossed it on to the breakfast table with a sigh.

"Mr. Isham Maunder is obviously an optimist," he mused. "I shall have to go and see him. Two thousand pounds! Gosh!"

At the moment Rudland's assets were a couple of hundred pounds and a brace of racehorses— Wheatear, a four-year-old son of Bird of Passage, and a brown aged horse by the same sire named Eagle's Flight— both with Malcolm Strange at his small stable near Mentone.

Rudland might have turned these animals into cash; but he regarded them as weapons of war. Wheatear was a very fine animal and entered for the Caulfield Cup, with a good chance of getting it; and as for Eagle's Flight, the nag was a favourite of Rudland's, and useful as an exercise companion for Wheatear.

Rudland had backed Wheatear for the Caulfield in bits and dabs during the winter, and believed the horse would save things for him at the V.A.T.C. meeting, and now here was Mr. Isham Maunder, who besides being a money lender, was also a racehorse owner and a sub rosa bookie, suggesting that he should part with the animal.

Dear Sir— wrote Mr. Maunder— *In reference to the note of hand you guaranteed for your friend, the late Mr. James Arnold, I have to remind you that this falls due for liquidation on the nineteenth inst., and as the late Mr. Arnold died, leaving no effects, it becomes your liability.*

It occurs to me, however, that in view of your own recent, financial difficulties you may find it inconvenient to meet this claim, and I am, therefore, writing to in-form you of my willingness to take your horse, Wheatear, which I understand is engaged in the coming Caulfield Cup, in liquidation of the two thousand pounds involved.

Kindly advise me by return of post whether you accept this suggestion or not as I am unable to renew the bill.

Yours faithfully,
Isham Maunder.

"Very subtle," smiled Rudland, reading the letter again. "Yes. I'll let Mr. Maunder know whether I accept his suggestion or not. the sly dog! I'll let him know this morning.''

IT WAS JUST STRIKING ELEVEN when he arrived at Mr. Maunder's discreet office in Collins-street.

Isham Maunder, was a big, florid man, with corn-coloured hair, eyes as hard as blue glass.

"Good morning: Mr. Rudland," he said. "Have a cigar..."

"No thanks, Maunder," said Rudland "I have come, to talk business..."

"No reason why we shouldn't do it comfortably, my boy," he said, ramming a smoke into his own mouth. "I always believe in taking the easy way in this life."

"So I've noticed,", murmured Rudland. "The easy way for yourself, the hard one for others...."

"That's the sort of mood you're in, is it?" said Maunder. "Did you get my letter?"

"I did," said Rudland. "That is what I've come to see you about. I'm afraid you'll have to wait twenty-four hours beyond the date of settlement for the liquidation of that bill. I am willing to pay any reasonable, interest charge you may require."

Mr. Maunder rolled his cigar from east to west of his mouth.

"I'm not waiting," he said with finality.

"I want either the money or the horse, on the nineteenth. Which is it to be?"

"Neither," answered Rudland. "You cant have the cash, because you know dashed well I haven't got it, and I decline to let you have 'Wheatear' before he has fulfilled his Caulfield engagement."

Maunder leaned comfortably back in his padded chair and blew a spiral of smoke ceiling-wards.

"You've got a pretty good nerve, Mr. Rudland," he said. "But you seem to have forgotten that I call the tune; and unless that two thousand is paid by the evening of this day week I shall distrain on your stables and seize the horse."

"This day week," murmured Rudland.

"That's the settlement date," snapped Maunder.

"And also the eve of the Caulfield Cup. Surely you can wait twenty-four hours to give me the chance of benefiting by his possible victory?"

"Victory!" sneered Maunder. "He doesn't stand a chance against my 'Glad Report'. And, anyway, he won't be a starter."

Rudland's eyes became brittle.

"He will. Maunder," he said quietly.

"He will not." grinned Maunder. "He'll be my property by then unless the cash is paid, and I shall scratch him!"

The muscles of Rudland's jaws tensed for a second, and then a contemptuous smile came to his lips.

"I thought that was your plan." he said bitingly. "You propose to milk the public of all the bets you have laid against 'Wheatear' in your bookmaking activities and at the same time relieve your animal of his most dangerous rival. Very cunning; but it won't come off. Good day."

MALCOLM STRANGE, like most trainers who have won their spurs by action rather than words, was a man of direct speech, and when Rudland, on the day following his interview with Maunder, visited Malcolm Strange greeted him with a curt and inquiring nod.

"Well, Mr. Rudland." he said, "and what might be the reason for this unexpected visit?'

Rudland grinned; and shook hands.

"I want, you to put me up for the night, Strange." he said. "And in the morning I want to see the horse which is going to save me from the gutter do a gallop."

"Save you from the gutter Mr. Rudland?" asked Strange., "Is that fact or fancy?"

"Fact," Rudland looked grim for a second, and then smiled, "I've backed Wheatear with two thousand I don't possess in cash to win me twelve I badly need, if he goes down he'll have to be sold, and so will Eagle's Flight; and I—well, I shall depart hence..."

Malcolm Strange pursed his lips and a considering look came into his eyes.

"I like pluck. Mr. Rudland," he said presently, "but it is a virtue which has robbed a good many men of their ease."

"I hope Wheatear isn't going to rob me of mine," said Rudland with a shrug.

But when the following morning he saw his "hope" deal with Eagle's Flight and a brace of pacemakers belonging to Strange, over a fast mile, he had no doubts on that score. Wheatear moved like a brown flash.

Returning to the house Rudland was pensive, and over breakfast told the trainer of Isham Maunder's suggestion and threat.

"The blighter won't get Wheatear from my stalls!" he declared.

"Trouble is," said Rudland, "that if his messenger is armed with a warrant you'll have a job in hindering him."

Shortly after evening stables on the day before the Caulfield Cup, a thick-necked gentleman known as "Bruiser" Watts, who held the proud position of Isham Maunder's "Final Argument," strolled into the stable yard and glanced round truculently.

Strange, expectant and on guard, met him with a grave and inquiring nod.

"And who might you be?" he asked aggressively.

"Bruiser" Watts feigned surprise.

"Why, ain't you exacting me?" he asked.

"We expect all sorts of roughs to be hanging around on the eve of a big race," said Strange.

An ugly expression came into Watts's face.

"Not so much lip. you," he snarled. "I'm a peace-loving man. I am; but my name is 'Bruiser' Watts and I ain't in no way misnamed. I ain't much good at talking, but I can argue pretty pungent with both fists. I've been sent down 'ere by Mr. Maunder to fetch a horse named Wheatear as belongs to a bloke called Rudland who owes my boss a lot of money, and I'm going to have the horse, too."

Strange shook his head.

"I don't think so," he said. "Mr. Rudland's instructions to me are to deliver that animal at Caulfield to-morrow in time to win the Cup, and I'm going to do that and nothing else."

"Ho, aren't you?" sneered "Bruiser," showing a row of jagged, discoloured teeth in a grin. "I've got authority, I 'ave," He dragged a slip of paper from his pocket and banded it to Strange. "Look at that..." he said.

The next minute he had whistled shrilly, and into the yard doubled another couple of toughs who had been lurking outside.

"Come on Spike!" shouted Watts. "That's the box-Number 10! You get the nag while I put this old blighter to sleep!"

Before Strange could come on guard to defend himself "Bruiser" kicked his legs from under him; and as the head stable boy ran forward the third rough flew at him and drove a massive fist into his wind.

"That's the dope!" gurgled "Bruiser", kneeling on Strange. "Now we'll lock 'em in the tackle-room there while we 'elp ourselves to the winner of the Caulfield— I don't think."

Presently, locked in the tackle room, Strange and the head lad heard the clip, clip of the thoroughbreds feet as he was led from the yard.

"Hi, you in there," called "Bruiser" Watts' voice, "we've got the 'orse and you've got the receipt, so all's in order."

EVERYONE IS JOLLY and hopeful on Caulfield Cup day; but of all the throng on the course, Isham Maunder looked blithest and gayest. In his pocket there nestled a telegram from "Bruiser" Watts stating that Wheatear was safely installed in a little stable near Flemington.

"There'll be an outcry when the punters find that Wheatear isn't on the course," he mused, and looked up as Izzy Davis, a confrere, strolled up.

"Your Glad Report going to get this, Isham, my boy?" he asked. "Or is Rudland's Wheatear too hot for him?'

"I don't somehow think Wheatear has a chance, Izzy," said Maunder.

"Well, I've just had a squint into the paddock and he looks damned good," answered Davis.

Maunder's eyes popped.

"Does he?" he exclaimed. "Has he arrived, then?"

"I think it was him," said Davis, wondering at Maunder's manner. "Anyway. Rudland and Strange; his trainer, are standing by his head."

Without waiting for more. Maunder hurried off to the paddock, and arriving there he saw a cluster of punters around a satin-skinned thoroughbred, while Rudland and Strange talked to Jones, the jockey, preparing the mount.

Watching an opportunity, Maunder grabbed one of Strange's stable lads as he strayed from the group round the horse.

"Here, what horse is that, my lad?" he asked.

The boy answered quickly.

"Eagle's—" He paused abruptly. "Wheatear, sir," he finished, and, wriggling from Maunder's grasp, hurried away.

Maunder opened his red mouth with satisfaction, and licked his upper lip like a hungry animal. "So that's Mr. 'Sharpy' Rudland's game, is it?" he mused. "Running Eagle's Flight in place of Wheatear, trusting to racing luck, and the ignorance of the stewards not to spot the difference between the two browns by the same sire... Well, we'll see. Ha! ha! Mr. Rudland won't only be broke... He'll be warned off for this!"

He returned to the ring, and "stood behind" the laying of a big chunk of money against Rudland's candidate.

From the ring he watched the horses go to the post, and as, after a quick start, the animals came along the first two furlongs, with Glad Report well in front of Rudland's colours in fourth place to Mixed Spice and Click-Clack, he chuckled and began to reckon up his winnings.

But at the half-way Maunder wasn't looking nearly so pleased. Glad Report was still in front, and didn't seem to be finding much difficult in staying there;

but Rudland's crimson jacket was now in second place and the horse looked full of going.

"By gad, that moke Eagle's Flight could hop it above a bit, after all," he thought. "No wonder Rudland had been tempted to chance his luck with him! But if he should get home first, what a fall it will be when I've said my little piece to the stewards."

The crowd along the rails were yelling Glad Report's name; but, suddenly, the cry dimmed as Rudland's crimson showed in front. It rose again as Maunder's yellow and green got the lead again; crescended into a roar as the horses fought over the last furlong, and then hushed for a second, to be renewed like the upward shriek of a rocket as Rudland's crimson fled past the judge's box half a length to the good!

Maunder's face was purple!

Half-way to the unsaddling enclosure he walked into George Rudland, looking as though he had just inherited the earth.

"Afternoon, Maunder," said Rudland. "You see, Wheatear proved just too good for your quad."

Maunder gave a snort, and his heavy lips curled back derisively.

"Don't try to pull that bluff across me," he grated. "Wheatear is safe in a stable at Flemington. And I have it from the lips of one of your trainer's stable lads that it was Eagle's Flight that passed the post first. . . We'll have a little inquiry into this... ."

Rudland was grinning broadly.

"No need to advertise the fact that you've been beaten at your own game. Maunder," he said. "Expecting something of this sort, I took the precaution of getting a certificate of identity before the race.... Here it is."

He waved the declaration before Maunder's nose, and the money-lender-cum-bookie goggled at it with bulging eyes.

"It's a fake!" he snarled.

"Oh, no, it isn't." grinned Rudland. "You see, your tough, 'Bruiser' Watts, was fool enough to collar the wrong horse!.... Wheatear was moved to Caulfield quarters two night's after our little interview, and, guessing you'd have a watcher, Eagle's Flight was put into Wheatear's box, and treated as though he was my Cup candidate. Mr. Strange tells me he is taking action against your messengers for assault."

Maunders tongue was palsied with rage.

"By heaven, I'll have the horse now, at any rate!" he flamed. "I'll seize him on the course for the debt!"

"You can't do that, as it happens," answered Rudland.

"What's to stop me, you four-flusher?'' boiled Maunder.

"The little fact that I hold the receipt your representative gave to Mr. Strange after he had taken forcible possession of a horse to which he had no claim."

Maunder commenced to bluster, but Rudland stilled him.

"Listen," he said. "This win has put me in funds, and as soon as you return Eagle's Flight to Mr. Strange's stables, and have caused 'Bruiser' Watts to make amends for the assault, I'll send you a cheque for the two thousand, and, out of the kindness of my heart, will add a half per cent, interest charge. But that's only if you are a good lad, and do as you are told. Now, good day!"

22: The Moment Of Victory

O. Henry

William Sydney Porter, 1862-1910

Munsey's Magazine May 1908

BEN GRANGER is a war veteran aged twenty-nine—which should enable you to guess the war. He is also principal merchant and postmaster of Cadiz, a little town over which the breezes from the Gulf of Mexico perpetually blow.

Ben helped to hurl the Don from his stronghold in the Greater Antilles; and then, hiking across half the world, he marched as a corporal-usher up and down the blazing tropic aisles of the open-air college in which the Filipino was schooled. Now, with his bayonet beaten into a cheese-slicer, he rallies his corporal's guard of cronies in the shade of his well-whittled porch, instead of in the matted jungles of Mindanao. Always have his interest and choice been for deeds rather than for words; but the consideration and digestion of motives is not beyond him, as this story, which is his, will attest.

"What is it," he asked me one moonlit eve, as we sat among his boxes and barrels, "that generally makes men go through dangers, and fire, and trouble, and starvation, and battle, and such recourses? What does a man do it for? Why does he try to outdo his fellow-humans, and be braver and stronger and more daring and showy than even his best friends are? What's his game? What does he expect to get out of it? He don't do it just for the fresh air and exercise. What would you say, now, Bill, that an ordinary man expects, generally speaking, for his efforts along the line of ambition and extraordinary hustling in the marketplaces, forums, shooting-galleries, lyceums, battle-fields, links, cinder-paths, and arenas of the civilized and vice versa places of the world?"

"Well, Ben," said I, with judicial seriousness, "I think we might safely limit the number of motives of a man who seeks fame to three—to ambition, which is a desire for popular applause; to avarice, which looks to the material side of success; and to love of some woman whom he either possesses or desires to possess."

Ben pondered over my words while a mocking-bird on the top of a mesquite by the porch trilled a dozen bars.

"I reckon," said he, "that your diagnosis about covers the case according to the rules laid down in the copy-books and historical readers. But what I had in my mind was the case of Willie Robbins, a person I used to know. I'll tell you about him before I close up the store, if you don't mind listening.

"Willie was one of our social set up in San Augustine. I was clerking there then for Brady & Murchison, wholesale dry-goods and ranch supplies. Willie and I belonged to the same german club and athletic association and military

company. He played the triangle in our serenading and quartet crowd that used to ring the welkin three nights a week somewhere in town.

"Willie jibed with his name considerable. He weighed about as much as a hundred pounds of veal in his summer suitings, and he had a 'Where-is-Mary?' expression on his features so plain that you could almost see the wool growing on him.

"And yet you couldn't fence him away from the girls with barbed wire. You know that kind of young fellows— a kind of a mixture of fools and angels— they rush in and fear to tread at the same time; but they never fail to tread when they get the chance. He was always on hand when 'a joyful occasion was had,' as the morning paper would say, looking as happy as a king full, and at the same time as uncomfortable as a raw oyster served with sweet pickles. He danced like he had hind hobbles on; and he had a vocabulary of about three hundred and fifty words that he made stretch over four germans a week, and plagiarized from to get him through two ice-cream suppers and a Sunday-night call. He seemed to me to be a sort of a mixture of Maltese kitten, sensitive plant, and a member of a stranded 'Two Orphans' company.

"I'll give you an estimate of his physiological and pictorial make-up, and then I'll stick spurs into the sides of my narrative.

"Willie inclined to the Caucasian in his coloring and manner of style. His hair was opalescent and his conversation fragmentary. His eyes were the same blue shade as the china dog's on the right-hand corner of your Aunt Ellen's mantelpiece. He took things as they came, and I never felt any hostility against him. I let him live, and so did others.

"But what does this Willie do but coax his heart out of his boots and lose it to Myra Allison, the liveliest, brightest, keenest, smartest, and prettiest girl in San Augustine. I tell you, she had the blackest eyes, the shiniest curls, and the most tantalizing— Oh, no, you're off— I wasn't a victim. I might have been, but I knew better. I kept out. Joe Granberry was It from the start. He had everybody else beat a couple of leagues and thence east to a stake and mound. But, anyhow, Myra was a nine-pound, full-merino, fall-clip fleece, sacked and loaded on a four-horse team for San Antone.

"One night there was an ice-cream sociable at Mrs. Colonel Spraggins', in San Augustine. We fellows had a big room up-stairs opened up for us to put our hats and things in, and to comb our hair and put on the clean collars we brought along inside the sweat-bands of our hats— in short, a room to fix up in just like they have everywhere at high-toned doings. A little farther down the hall was the girls' room, which they used to powder up in, and so forth. Downstairs we— that is, the San Augustine Social Cotillion and Merrymakers' Club— had a stretcher put down in the parlor where our dance was going on.

"Willie Robbins and me happened to be up in our— cloak-room, I believe we called it—when Myra Allison skipped through the hall on her way down-stairs from the girls' room. Willie was standing before the mirror, deeply interested in smoothing down the blond grass-plot on his head, which seemed to give him lots of trouble. Myra was always full of life and devilment. She stopped and stuck her head in our door. She certainly was good-looking. But I knew how Joe Granberry stood with her. So did Willie; but he kept on ba-a-a-ing after her and following her around. He had a system of persistence that didn't coincide with pale hair and light eyes.

" 'Hello, Willie!' says Myra. 'What are you doing to yourself in the glass?'

" 'I'm trying to look fly,' says Willie.

" 'Well, you never could be fly,' says Myra, with her special laugh, which was the provokingest sound I ever heard except the rattle of an empty canteen against my saddle-horn.

"I looked around at Willie after Myra had gone. He had a kind of a lily-white look on him which seemed to show that her remark had, as you might say, disrupted his soul. I never noticed anything in what she said that sounded particularly destructive to a man's ideas of self-consciousness; but he was set back to an extent you could scarcely imagine.

"After we went down-stairs with our clean collars on, Willie never went near Myra again that night. After all, he seemed to be a diluted kind of a skim-milk sort of a chap, and I never wondered that Joe Granberry beat him out.

"The next day the battleship *Maine* was blown up, and then pretty soon somebody— I reckon it was Joe Bailey, or Ben Tillman, or maybe the Government— declared war against Spain.

"Well, everybody south of Mason & Hamlin's line knew that the North by itself couldn't whip a whole country the size of Spain. So the Yankees commenced to holler for help, and the Johnny Rebs answered the call. 'We're coming, Father William, a hundred thousand strong— and then some,' was the way they sang it. And the old party lines drawn by Sherman's march and the Kuklux and nine-cent cotton and the Jim Crow street-car ordinances faded away. We became one undivided country, with no North, very little East, a good-sized chunk of West, and a South that loomed up as big as the first foreign label on a new eight-dollar suit-case.

"Of course the dogs of war weren't a complete pack without a yelp from the San Augustine Rifles, Company D, of the Fourteenth Texas Regiment. Our company was among the first to land in Cuba and strike terror into the hearts of the foe. I'm not going to give you a history of the war, I'm just dragging it in to fill out my story about Willie Robbins, just as the Republican party dragged it in to help out the election in 1898.

"If anybody ever had heroitis, it was that Willie Robbins. From the minute he set foot on the soil of the tyrants of Castile he seemed to engulf danger as a cat laps up cream. He certainly astonished every man in our company, from the captain up. You'd have expected him to gravitate naturally to the job of an orderly to the colonel, or typewriter in the commissary— but not any. He created the part of the flaxen-haired boy hero who lives and gets back home with the goods, instead of dying with an important despatch in his hands at his colonel's feet.

"Our company got into a section of Cuban scenery where one of the messiest and most unsung portions of the campaign occurred. We were out every day capering around in the bushes, and having little skirmishes with the Spanish troops that looked more like kind of tired-out feuds than anything else. The war was a joke to us, and of no interest to them. We never could see it any other way than as a howling farce-comedy that the San Augustine Rifles were actually fighting to uphold the Stars and Stripes. And the blamed little señors didn't get enough pay to make them care whether they were patriots or traitors. Now and then somebody would get killed. It seemed like a waste of life to me. I was at Coney Island when I went to New York once, and one of them down-hill skidding apparatuses they call 'roller-coasters' flew the track and killed a man in a brown sack-suit. Whenever the Spaniards shot one of our men, it struck me as just about as unnecessary and regrettable as that was.

"But I'm dropping Willie Robbins out of the conversation.

"He was out for bloodshed, laurels, ambition, medals, recommendations, and all other forms of military glory. And he didn't seem to be afraid of any of the recognized forms of military danger, such as Spaniards, cannon-balls, canned beef, gunpowder, or nepotism. He went forth with his pallid hair and china-blue eyes and ate up Spaniards like you would sardines à la canopy. Wars and rumbles of wars never flustered him. He would stand guard-duty, mosquitoes, hardtack, treat, and fire with equally perfect unanimity. No blondes in history ever come in comparison distance of him except the Jack of Diamonds and Queen Catherine of Russia.

"I remember, one time, a little caballard of Spanish men sauntered out from behind a patch of sugar-cane and shot Bob Turner, the first sergeant of our company, while we were eating dinner. As required by the army regulations, we fellows went through the usual tactics of falling into line, saluting the enemy, and loading and firing, kneeling.

"That wasn't the Texas way of scrapping; but, being a very important addendum and annex to the regular army, the San Augustine Rifles had to conform to the red-tape system of getting even.

"By the time we had got out our 'Upton's Tactics,' turned to page fifty-seven, said 'one— two—three— one— two— three' a couple of times, and got blank cartridges into our Springfields, the Spanish outfit had smiled repeatedly, rolled and lit cigarettes by squads, and walked away contemptuously.

"I went straight to Captain Floyd, and says to him: 'Sam, I don't think this war is a straight game. You know as well as I do that Bob Turner was one of the whitest fellows that ever threw a leg over a saddle, and now these wirepullers in Washington have fixed his clock. He's politically and ostensibly dead. It ain't fair. Why should they keep this thing up? If they want Spain licked, why don't they turn the San Augustine Rifles and Joe Seely's ranger company and a car-load of West Texas deputy-sheriffs onto these Spaniards, and let us exonerate them from the face of the earth? I never did,' says I, 'care much about fighting by the Lord Chesterfield ring rules. I'm going to hand in my resignation and go home if anybody else I am personally acquainted with gets hurt in this war. If you can get somebody in my place, Sam,' says I, 'I'll quit the first of next week. I don't want to work in an army that don't give its help a chance. Never mind my wages,' says I; 'let the Secretary of the Treasury keep 'em.'

" 'Well, Ben,' says the captain to me, 'your allegations and estimations of the tactics of war, government, patriotism, guard-mounting, and democracy are all right. But I've looked into the system of international arbitration and the ethics of justifiable slaughter a little closer, maybe, than you have. Now, you can hand in your resignation the first of next week if you are so minded. But if you do,' says Sam, 'I'll order a corporal's guard to take you over by that limestone bluff on the creek and shoot enough lead into you to ballast a submarine air-ship. I'm captain of this company, and I've swore allegiance to the Amalgamated States regardless of sectional, secessional, and Congressional differences. Have you got any smoking-tobacco?' winds up Sam. 'Mine got wet when I swum the creek this morning.'

"The reason I drag all this non ex parte evidence in is because Willie Robbins was standing there listening to us. I was a second sergeant and he was a private then, but among us Texans and Westerners there never was as much tactics and subordination as there was in the regular army. We never called our captain anything but 'Sam' except when there was a lot of major-generals and admirals around, so as to preserve the discipline.

"And says Willie Robbins to me, in a sharp construction of voice much unbecoming to his light hair and previous record:

" 'You ought to be shot, Ben, for emitting any such sentiments. A man that won't fight for his country is worse than a horse-thief. If I was the cap, I'd put you in the guard-house for thirty days on round steak and tamales. War,' says Willie, 'is great and glorious. I didn't know you were a coward.'

" 'I'm not,' says I. 'If I was, I'd knock some of the pallidness off of your marble brow. I'm lenient with you,' I says, 'just as I am with the Spaniards, because you have always reminded me of something with mushrooms on the side. Why, you little Lady of Shalott,' says I, 'you underdone leader of cotillions, you glassy fashion and moulded form, you white-pine soldier made in the Cisalpine Alps in Germany for the late New-Year trade, do you know of whom you are talking to? We've been in the same social circle,' says I, 'and I've put up with you because you seemed so meek and self-un-satisfying. I don't understand why you have so sudden taken a personal interest in chivalrousness and murder. Your nature's undergone a complete revelation. Now, how is it?'

" 'Well, you wouldn't understand, Ben,' says Willie, giving one of his refined smiles and turning away.

" 'Come back here!' says I, catching him by the tail of his khaki coat. 'You've made me kind of mad, in spite of the aloofness in which I have heretofore held you. You are out for making a success in this hero business, and I believe I know what for. You are doing it either because you are crazy or because you expect to catch some girl by it. Now, if it's a girl, I've got something here to show you.'

"I wouldn't have done it, but I was plumb mad. I pulled a San Augustine paper out of my hip-pocket, and showed him an item. It was a half a column about the marriage of Myra Allison and Joe Granberry.

"Willie laughed, and I saw I hadn't touched him.

" 'Oh,' says he, 'everybody knew that was going to happen. I heard about that a week ago.' And then he gave me the laugh again.

" 'All right,' says I. 'Then why do you so recklessly chase the bright rainbow of fame? Do you expect to be elected President, or do you belong to a suicide club?'

"And then Captain Sam interferes.

" 'You gentlemen quit jawing and go back to your quarters,' says he, 'or I'll have you escorted to the guard-house. Now, scat, both of you! Before you go, which one of you has got any chewing-tobacco?'

"'We're off, Sam,' says I. 'It's supper-time, anyhow. But what do you think of what we was talking about? I've noticed you throwing out a good many grappling-hooks for this here balloon called fame— What's ambition, anyhow? What does a man risk his life day after day for? Do you know of anything he gets in the end that can pay him for the trouble? I want to go back home,' says I. 'I don't care whether Cuba sinks or swims, and I don't give a pipeful of rabbit tobacco whether Queen Sophia Christina or Charlie Culberson rules these fairy isles; and I don't want my name on any list except the list of survivors. But I've

noticed you, Sam,' says I, 'seeking the bubble notoriety in the cannon's larynx a number of times. Now, what do you do it for? Is it ambition, business, or some freckle-faced Phœbe at home that you are heroing for?'

" 'Well, Ben,' says Sam, kind of hefting his sword out from between his knees, 'as your superior officer I could court-martial you for attempted cowardice and desertion. But I won't. And I'll tell you why I'm trying for promotion and the usual honors of war and conquest. A major gets more pay than a captain, and I need the money.'

" 'Correct for you!' says I. 'I can understand that. Your system of fame-seeking is rooted in the deepest soil of patriotism. But I can't comprehend,' says I, 'why Willie Robbins, whose folks at home are well off, and who used to be as meek and undesirous of notice as a cat with cream on his whiskers, should all at once develop into a warrior bold with the most fire-eating kind of proclivities. And the girl in his case seems to have been eliminated by marriage to another fellow. I reckon,' says I, 'it's a plain case of just common ambition. He wants his name, maybe, to go thundering down the coroners of time. It must be that.'

"Well, without itemizing his deeds, Willie sure made good as a hero. He simply spent most of his time on his knees begging our captain to send him on forlorn hopes and dangerous scouting expeditions. In every fight he was the first man to mix it at close quarters with the Don Alfonsos. He got three or four bullets planted in various parts of his autonomy. Once he went off with a detail of eight men and captured a whole company of Spanish. He kept Captain Floyd busy writing out recommendations of his bravery to send in to headquarters; and he began to accumulate medals for all kinds of things— heroism and target-shooting and valor and tactics and uninsubordination, and all the little accomplishments that look good to the third assistant secretaries of the War Department.

"Finally, Cap Floyd got promoted to be a major-general, or a knight commander of the main herd, or something like that. He pounded around on a white horse, all desecrated up with gold-leaf and hen-feathers and a Good Templar's hat, and wasn't allowed by the regulations to speak to us. And Willie Robbins was made captain of our company.

"And maybe he didn't go after the wreath of fame then! As far as I could see it was him that ended the war. He got eighteen of us boys— friends of his, too— killed in battles that he stirred up himself, and that didn't seem to me necessary at all. One night he took twelve of us and waded through a little rill about a hundred and ninety yards wide, and climbed a couple of mountains, and sneaked through a mile of neglected shrubbery and a couple of rock-quarries and into a rye-straw village, and captured a Spanish general named, as

they said, Benny Veedus. Benny seemed to me hardly worth the trouble, being a blackish man without shoes or cuffs, and anxious to surrender and throw himself on the commissary of his foe.

"But that job gave Willie the big boost he wanted. The *San Augustine News* and the Galveston, St. Louis, New York, and Kansas City papers printed his picture and columns of stuff about him. Old San Augustine simply went crazy over its 'gallant son.' The *News* had an editorial tearfully begging the Government to call off the regular army and the national guard, and let Willie carry on the rest of the war single-handed. It said that a refusal to do so would be regarded as a proof that the Northern jealousy of the South was still as rampant as ever.

"If the war hadn't ended pretty soon, I don't know to what heights of gold braid and encomiums Willie would have climbed; but it did. There was a secession of hostilities just three days after he was appointed a colonel, and got in three more medals by registered mail, and shot two Spaniards while they were drinking lemonade in an ambuscade.

"Our company went back to San Augustine when the war was over. There wasn't anywhere else for it to go. And what do you think? The old town notified us in print, by wire cable, special delivery, and a nigger named Saul sent on a gray mule to San Antone, that they was going to give us the biggest blow-out, complimentary, alimentary, and elementary, that ever disturbed the kildees on the sand-flats outside of the immediate contiguity of the city.

"I say 'we,' but it was all meant for ex-Private, Captain de facto, and Colonel-elect Willie Robbins. The town was crazy about him. They notified us that the reception they were going to put up would make the Mardi Gras in New Orleans look like an afternoon tea in Bury St. Edmunds with a curate's aunt.

"Well, the San Augustine Rifles got back home on schedule time. Everybody was at the depot giving forth Roosevelt-Democrat— they used to be called Rebel— yells. There was two brass-bands, and the mayor, and schoolgirls in white frightening the street-car horses by throwing Cherokee roses in the streets, and— well, maybe you've seen a celebration by a town that was inland and out of water.

"They wanted Brevet-Colonel Willie to get into a carriage and be drawn by prominent citizens and some of the city aldermen to the armory, but he stuck to his company and marched at the head of it up Sam Houston Avenue. The buildings on both sides was covered with flags and audiences, and everybody hollered 'Robbins!' or 'Hello, Willie!' as we marched up in files of fours. I never saw a illustriouser-looking human in my life than Willie was. He had at least seven or eight medals and diplomas and decorations on the breast of his khaki

coat; he was sunburnt the color of a saddle, and he certainly done himself proud.

"They told us at the depot that the courthouse was to be illuminated at half-past seven, and there would be speeches and chili-con-carne at the Palace Hotel. Miss Delphine Thompson was to read an original poem by James Whitcomb Ryan, and Constable Hooker had promised us a salute of nine guns from Chicago that he had arrested that day.

"After we had disbanded in the armory, Willie says to me:

" 'Want to walk out a piece with me?'

" 'Why, yes,' says I, 'if it ain't so far that we can't hear the tumult and the shouting die away. I'm hungry myself,' says I, 'and I'm pining for some home grub, but I'll go with you.'

"Willie steered me down some side streets till we came to a little white cottage in a new lot with a twenty-by-thirty-foot lawn decorated with brickbats and old barrel-staves.

" 'Halt and give the countersign,' says I to Willie. 'Don't you know this dugout? It's the bird's-nest that Joe Granberry built before he married Myra Allison. What you going there for?'

"But Willie already had the gate open. He walked up the brick walk to the steps, and I went with him. Myra was sitting in a rocking-chair on the porch, sewing. Her hair was smoothed back kind of hasty and tied in a knot. I never noticed till then that she had freckles. Joe was at one side of the porch, in his shirt-sleeves, with no collar on, and no signs of a shave, trying to scrape out a hole among the brickbats and tin cans to plant a little fruit-tree in. He looked up but never said a word, and neither did Myra.

"Willie was sure dandy-looking in his uniform, with medals strung on his breast and his new gold-handled sword. You'd never have taken him for the little white-headed snipe that the girls used to order about and make fun of. He just stood there for a minute, looking at Myra with a peculiar little smile on his face; and then he says to her, slow, and kind of holding on to his words with his teeth:

" 'Oh, I don't know! Maybe I could if I tried!'

"That was all that was said. Willie raised his hat, and we walked away.

"And, somehow, when he said that, I remembered, all of a sudden, the night of that dance and Willie brushing his hair before the looking-glass, and Myra sticking her head in the door to guy him.

"When we got back to Sam Houston Avenue, Willie says:

" 'Well, so long, Ben. I'm going down home and get off my shoes and take a rest.'

" 'You?' says I. 'What's the matter with you? Ain't the court-house jammed with everybody in town waiting to honor the hero? And two brass-bands, and recitations and flags and jags and grub to follow waiting for you?'

"Willie sighs.

" 'All right, Ben,' says he. 'Darned if I didn't forget all about that.'

"And that's why I say," concluded Ben Granger, "that you can't tell where ambition begins any more than you can where it is going to wind up."

23: The Writings of Maconochie Hoe

Edgar Wallace

1875-1932

The Novel Magazine, Oct 1919

York Symon, one of Wallace's lesser known series characters, was a newspaperman who signed as Y. Symon. To friends and associates this sometimes became Wise Symon. There were just 10 tales in the series, nine of which were collected in a paperback entitled "The Reporter," published by Readers Library in 1929. I later found the 10th story and created a Version 2 of the collection which is in the MobileRead Library. This story is the second in the series.

THAT Wise Symon was a great reporter nobody has ever seriously questioned. If he had a weakness it was his inability to tackle effectively any case in which a woman was incriminated. A month ago Maconochie Hoe's greatest book was published. Those who saw the beautifully bound volume on his shelf smiled knowingly and congratulated him upon his wonderful recovery of the Hoe Manuscripts. But now, as ever, Wise Symon denied that he ever handled those remarkable manuscripts, and this narrative, given for the first time, supports his statement.

Wise Symon, as has been remarked before, was something more than a police correspondent. Any cub reporter with a knowledge of shorthand and a reasonably good memory can place on record events which have happened. It was Wise Symon's speciality, and for this he was renowned from one end of the country to the other, that he created the events which he recorded.

From the smallest beginnings he could erect the most imposing fabrics, which were fabrics of substance and fact. His theory was that the man was charged with something less than his real offence. He believed that behind every detected crime there was a greater crime which was undetected and, on this theory, he had brought to justice such criminals as the Brenner Gang (John Brenner had originally been charged with speeding an unnumbered motor-car, and it was Wise Symon who discovered why that number was missing and what made John in such a particular hurry one night in July).

It was his faith that, however interesting a case might be, there was something more interesting behind it, and even the novel crime of "The Ransomeers" did not seem to him to exhaust all the possibilities in those extraordinary cases.

"The Ransomeers" was a nickname which had been given by Wise Symon himself to a small gang of criminals. They were criminals with unusual methods, who, as their name implied, derived their handsome competence not so much from the abduction of persons as from holding to ransom those personal properties "of no value to anybody but their owners," the tale of loss

and the plea for recovery of which fill no little advertising space in the Press of the world from year to year. Every well-off man or woman owns some material thing which of itself is worth (figuratively) ten cents net on the open market, but to which he or she attaches a value beyond computation. It was on this class that "The Ransomeers" preyed. It cost that wealthy man, Sykes Main, over £1,000 to get back his father's watch. Dubonnet, of Dubonnet and Benson, paid as much for the skin of a lion which he had shot in Africa, and which, incidentally, had almost killed Dubonnet. Mrs. Simson, the wife of Simson's Amalgamated Breweries (there was also a Mr. Simson somewhere in the background but he never appeared), had paid £2,000 for the recovery of an engagement ring. It was not the engagement ring which Mr. Simson had given her, but such a symbol of bygone romance as you might expect a stout, red-faced woman would keep in a secret place with letters tied up with blue ribbon and sprigs of rosemary.

"The Ransomeers" began by being a novelty and ended by being a nuisance. Unpleasant things were said about the police, as unpleasant things are invariably said on such occasions, but the good work of collecting other people's souvenirs went on.

Wise Symon took more than an academic interest in the operations of the gang: he spent a stealthy fortnight watching a suspect, and one rainy evening he walked into the Central Police Office on the Embankment and asked to see the Chief Superintendent. He was tired-looking and unshaven, as was natural, for he had not been to bed for two days and two nights.

The great policeman came out. "Hullo! Symon," he said. "What's the trouble?"

"I've found your 'Ransomeers,'" said Symon wearily. "The two brothers McGuire and a man named Dolan."

"The devil!" said the Chief.

"He may be a fourth member," said Symon, "but I'll leave you to deal with him."

"Are you sure?" asked Superintendent Briscoe seriously. "I thought the McGuires were running straight. They haven't been in trouble for two years. You mean Patsy and Mike, don't you ?"

Wise Symon nodded.

"They do the lifting and Dolan does the locating. Dolan is the clever man of the party. You'll usually find him lunching at fashionable restaurants, and he knows most of the lads about town. That is how he got his information. Dolan is also the go-between when it comes to paying up."

"Good for you, if this is true," said the Chief, rising and striking the bell. "I'll pull those fellows in straightaway. I'll act on your information and get the details after."

"You'll find the details between Mike's mattresses," said Wise Symon. "I've been on their track for about a month, ever since they pinched the Moses woman's pet chow and threatened to return it ear by ear unless she paid up £400."

Answering the bell came Detective Roon, at sight of whom, despite his weariness, Wise Symon must affect startled surprise. Detective Roon, with his pointed moustache, his well-polished hair, and his complacency, was invariably provocative.

"Hullo! Symon," nodded Roon easily, "I haven't seen you for a long time. I've got a lot of little things to tell you."

"I'll bet they're little," said Symon.

"Take Strutt and Bransome," said the Chief, "and any other men you want, arrest the brothers McGuire and a man named Bolan. Mr. Symon will give you some information as to where he is to be found."

"Cailley's Restaurant—third table," said Wise Symon promptly. "He's dining a peroxide blonde from the Hip-i-addy Beauty Chorus."

The telephone bell on the Chief's table shrilled.

"See what that is, Roon," said the Chief.

Roon picked up the receiver and answered in monosyllables. Presently he put the receiver down, paused for drama's sake, and then:

" 'The Ransomeers' have been at it again, sir," he said breathlessly. "They've pinched the Hoe Manuscripts!"

"The Hoe Manuscripts!" Wise Symon whistled, and all his weariness seemed to fall from him. "Why, of course, they'd go for those! I never thought of 'em. I've been trying to think of all the precious heirlooms of the city, and the Hoe Manuscripts slipped past me!"

"Pull in the McGuires, quick!" said the Chief, addressing Roon.

"I seem to know something about the Hoe Manuscripts. What are they?" he asked, after Roon had left.

Wise Symon took a cigar from his pocket, thoughtfully bit off the end and lit it before he humped himself into an easy-chair.

"Not Maconochie Hoe?" asked the Superintendent suddenly.

Wise Symon nodded.

"Maconochie Hoe, of course," said the policeman. "I've heard a lot about those writings of his that he left when he died, but I'm not much of a literary man."

"Anyway, you knew about Maconochie Hoe," said Wise Symon grimly.

The Chief smiled.

"Oh, yes, I knew him," he said. "I've had him three times in this very charge room, twice being held down by officers—that was when he had delirium tremens. And, of course, I know his books are the best sellers on the market, My wife has the complete collection—there was one published last month—let me see, what was it called?"

"*Her Dreams Came Not True*," said Wise Symon.

"What is the story, anyway?" asked the Chief.

"An unpleasant story, prettily told," replied Wise Symon with a little grimace. "Maconochie Hoe was the biggest thing in writers we have had in this country for twenty years. You may not know anything about the business side of literature, Chief, but I can tell you that that man coined money. His books sold by the hundreds of thousands. If Hoe had kept straight, he'd have been a very rich man. If he had only looked upon the wine when it was red he would have been alive and prosperous; but nothing short of rainbow variations suited Maconochie. He went right through the spectrum—from orange bitters to green Chartreuse."

"Oh, yes! I remember—and he married too."

Wise Symon nodded gravely.

"He married the sweetest girl that ever put a pen to paper," he said. "Sylvia Maxson. I don't know where Maconochie came from—out of the gutter, I guess. Maybe, if he hadn't drunk he wouldn't have risen. I usually find that people who have to be doped before they're inspired are built that way. But she's aristocrat all through—at least, she married—" he paused, "and went through hell."

The Chief nodded.

"Yes, I recall the court case," he said.

"There were one or two court cases in which she figured," said Wise Symon. "She brought an action against him to secure a separation. He stood up in court and made suggestions about her that would have brought a blush to the cheeks of Ananias."

"What I can't quite understand," said Briscoe, "is about these manuscripts. How is it that, although he has been dead for four or five years, his stories are still published—were those the writings he left?"

"He was a prolific writer," explained Symon. "I should say he wrote novels in his sleep. Stories with just a little bit of sex and a great deal of sentiment—the kind of sob stuff that goes straight to your heart. Boozers and dope fiends have the knack of it. He wrote a plenty, but the market couldn't absorb more than two books of his a year, and I suppose that the others he wrote were put by. At any rate, he had a round dozen in his safe when he died. To everybody's

surprise he left his manuscripts to the wife he hated and whom he had never ceased to revile."

"But if your McGuire story is right, there should be no difficulty in getting back Mrs. Hoe's property," said the Chief.

That Wise Symon's information was well-founded was proved beyond doubt within an hour. The two McGuires were arrested in their respective beds, to which they had retired like good citizens, and they surrendered to the processes of the law with the philosophy which is the personal charm of a certain section of the criminal classes. Dolan was less of a philosopher, being the cleverer of the trio. He showed fight, and there was an exciting ten minutes before they got the gun out of his hand and removed him, handcuffed and voluble, to the nearest police cell.

A search of the McGuires' premises discovered sufficient evidence to convict them ten times over. Briscoe interviewed Mike McGuire in the cell.

"Make it as easy as you can for us, Superintendent," said the earnest Michael. "We've done nobody any harm, and we haven't had a winner for a month."

"I'll order up a squad of marines to hear that story," said Briscoe good-humouredly; "it's the kind of fiction they're partial to. What about the Hoe Manuscripts? Before you speak," he said, "I'll tell you all we know. Mrs. Hoe's apartment was burgled while she was out to dinner; the safe in her study was forced, was found open when she returned, and empty. You were seen outside the building, and I've got the evidence of a cab-driver who can identify both you and your brother as having been driven away from the corner of the block about the hour the burglary was committed."

Mike shook his head vigorously.

"I'm going to tell you the truth, anyway. You can believe it or not, as you like. It is true that me and Patsy smashed that place. We'd heard a lot about the Hoe Manuscripts and their value, and Dolan, who's of a literary turn of mind, thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to pinch 'em. We reckoned they'd be worth three or four hundred, anyway. So Patsy went and did some window-cleaning at the apartments, got friendly with one of the servants, and found that Mrs. Hoe was dining with friends. We went up there to-night and we busted the safe all right."

"Well?" replied Briscoe, as the other paused.

"There was nothing in it," replied the burglar earnestly. "Patsy did the job and I looked on. It took him fifteen minutes to get the safe open—and it was empty."

"Empty!" repeated the Chief.

"It's the truth I'm telling you," said the man vehemently. "That safe was full of nothing except a few old account books. Somebody had been there before us."

The Chief shook his head.

"I'm giving it you straight," said the man. "After all, it doesn't do me any good telling you a lie. We'll have to go down for smashing the safe we shouldn't get very much more for taking the manuscripts."

Which seemed logical to Wise Symon when the story was told him by Detective Roon.

"Now my theory is," said Roon, "that there's another gang working. Any man of common sense knows that McGuire's speaking the truth."

"Even you know that," said Wise Symon unpleasantly. "Have you seen Mrs. Hoe?"

Roon nodded his head.

"She won't give me much information. She referred me to her publishers. I went down there and all that they could tell me was that there were six manuscripts of the late Maconochie which had disappeared."

"Did you get their titles?" Mr. Roon smiled broadly.

"Why, of course, my dear fellow," he said, with insolent familiarity. "You don't suppose that I'd go there and not get the titles?"

"I expect you didn't think of them until he gave them to you," accused Wise Symon. "Maybe— maybe not," said Roon uncomfortably. "At any rate, here they are." He pulled a, sheet of paper from his waistcoat pocket, adjusted pince- nez.

"Here are the titles," he said. "The first is 'Farewell! Farewell!' The second is 'Her Humbled Pride.' The third is 'The Best Hated.' The fourth is 'Her Pride in the Dust.' The fifth is 'Little Miss Nose-in-the-Air,' and the sixth is 'She Married for Fame.' "

Wise Symon jotted down the titles and nodded. "I'll see Drenkew," he said. "He's more likely to talk to a man of genius and sensibility than to well, to you, for example."

"Thank you," said Roon, elaborately sarcastic.

Mr. Drenkew, of the publishers, Drenkew & Hurd, could offer little more information than Roon had procured.

"You pretty well know the facts, Mr. Symon," he said. "Our late client, Maconochie Hoe, left a number of finished manuscripts at his death, and these were bequeathed by his will to his wife when he died – happily for her."

"Why do you say happily for her?" asked Symon.

Mr. Brenkew shrugged.

"The character of Mr. Hoe is pretty well known to you. He died absolutely penniless, in spite of his huge income. His wife, as you know, was a writer when he married her. In fact, we published one or two of her books, and it was at this office that Maconochie Hoe first met her. I feel inclined to say 'unfortunately,'" smiled Mr. Drenkew. "We knew that he had several books on the way, but until he referred to them in his will we had no idea that he had such a large number. The works which we have published of his since his death have been even more successful than those published in his lifetime, and Mrs. Hoe has a very handsome competence. It is a most serious matter for her that these manuscripts are stolen."

"Hoe did not collaborate with his wife?" fished Wise Symon.

Mr. Brenkew shook his head. "Never! He was jealous of her. When he married Sylvia Maxson he smashed a very promising career. A few months after she was married she submitted a very excellent story to us—better than anything that Maconochie Hoe had ever written, in my judgment. Very indiscreetly one of my readers expressed that opinion, and Hoe came down one morning, demanded his wife's manuscript, and burnt it in front of my eyes—that was the kind of man Maconochie Hoe was.

"The six years of her married life must have been a hell on earth for the poor girl, and it is wonderful to me that she survived it. He killed her career as effectively as he killed her faith in human nature. That he should at the last repent, and endeavour to make some reparation for the wrong he had done her, is truly remarkable. Remember, that up to the very last week of his life he was ill-treating her."

Wise Symon scratched his chin. "Can you tell me any peculiarities of Maconochie Hoe?" The other shook his head. "I think you know them all," he said drily. "I was looking up correspondence I have had with him, and if ever handwriting gave away a man, his does." He opened a portfolio, turned some sheets of correspondence, and showed a letter written in a large, straggling hand to his interested visitor.

"Look at the egotism of it," said Drenkew. "The weird calligraphy—every other word beginning with a capital letter—he put that style into his books too, and we had some job to persuade him to restrict this mannerism."

Wise Symon was looking at the letter.

"Did he always write in green ink?"

"Invariably. That was one of his little eccentricities."

"Can you explain," asked Wise Symon, "why he should leave her valuable property? Was he generous with her when he was alive?"

"Quite the contrary," said Mr. Drenkew. "He was the meanest man with money, so far as his wife was concerned, that I have ever met. He paid all the

household bills himself, and allowed her just enough to clothe herself decently. She was reduced to selling stories surreptitiously to the magazines. That is one of the most inexplicable features of his life. He undoubtedly made the will, and it was found in his drawer and was witnessed by two servants—a parlour-maid and a cook—whom he had called up from the kitchen one riotous evening about three months before his death, to read over the document and to affix their signatures. There is not the slightest doubt as to the authenticity of the will. The only mystery is why he made it at all. If you are curious about the will I can show you a photograph of it," said Drenkew, and, rising from his desk, he unlocked a safe and took from a drawer a mounted photograph. This was undoubtedly Hoe's writing, thought Wise Symon, who was something of a handwriting expert. He read the photographed document through, and handed it back to the other without a word.

"Of the books specified there," said Mr. Brenkew, as he locked away the photograph, "we have published two: 'Her Dreams Came Not True' and 'Her Education' – both of which have achieved a remarkable sale."

"And the remainder, I gather, are amongst the missing?"

"Yes; it is rather a tragedy for us, because we had already arranged the publication of the third of the books: 'The Best Hated.' "

"Do you decide which books are to be published?" asked Wise Symon.

"No," replied the publisher; "the arrangement is very simple. When we want a book, Mrs. Hoe usually brings it down. She chooses the order in which they shall appear, and in such matters has always been an autocrat. However, we have had no cause for complaint, and if the other stories were as good as those we have published, undoubtedly the world is the poorer through the loss."

Wise Symon went back to his office a thoughtful man. He wrote his story, still thoughtful, and when the Managing Editor read it in proof he frowned, and sent for the police reporter.

"This yarn's a bit wooden, Symon," he said. "Heaven knows there's enough material for half a dozen stories. Why didn't you make more of the Hoe Manuscripts? Do you also think they haven't been taken from the house?" he asked, looking up sharply.

Symon nodded.

"That's my theory, too," said the editor. "I knew Hoe pretty well, and I tell you frankly he was a beast. He hated his wife as only a bad man can hate a good woman, and it's my belief that the other six stories were designed to humiliate her, and that he held them back until he died so that he gave her the choice of poverty or publishing stories which were intended for her humiliation. I have been skimming through the two books which have been

published since his death. It struck me that there is a hint of something worse to come."

"You don't think they have been stolen?" suggested Wise Symon.

"No, I do not," replied the editor; "and that's the story I should like you to get after, Symon. It's the sort of thing that's been done before. You remember Lady Burton destroyed her husband's manuscripts because she did not think that their publication would be to the advantage of the world. My idea is that Mrs. Hoe has either destroyed or is hiding those six books to save herself."

The editor rose from his chair and, walking to the window, his hands thrust into his pockets, stared out.

"If you get the truth," he said at last, "I'd like you to let this little woman down lightly You have a criminal mind—"

"Thank you," said Wise Symon.

"Well, you have; there's no sense in pretending that you haven't. You must have a criminal mind if you're dealing with criminals and can anticipate. For it's only by anticipating their next move that you can detect them. And you will be able to suggest ways and means whereby the loss of these manuscripts are accounted for."

"I'll see her," said Wise Symon; and, true to his promise, that afternoon he walked across the town to the quiet residential street wherein Mrs. Hoe had her flat. It was Mrs. Hoe herself who answered Wise Symon's ring. A tall girl, with sad, dark eyes, possessed of a certain spirituel beauty which men dream about but seldom meet in the flesh, she carried, even in her poise someting of the tragedy of the six years through which she had passed.

She looked at Symon's card, and from the card to his face. "I didn't want to see a reporter," she said; "but I know you by repute, Mr. Symon. Won't you come in, please?"

She closed the door behind him and led the way to a cosily furnished little study. "My one servant has left me," she said. "I think the burglary must have scared her."

There was a faint and fleeting smile on her lips when she said this, and with a slight gesture of her hand she indicated a chair.

"You've come to talk about the manuscripts, I suppose. I can give you very little information."

"You mean you will give me very little information, Mrs. Hoe," smiled Wise Symon. "Of course, you know that the burglar said he did not find any of the stories?"

She inclined her head.

I know that," she said. "I wish the Press would let the whole matter drop."

"You're not keen on recovering them?" asked Symon quickly.

She hesitated.

"Not particularly," she replied with a faint flush. Wise Symon knew when to be silent, and this was such a time. His fingers drummed nervously upon the table by which she was standing, and her eyes, wondering, fearing, a little resentful, were fixed upon his face.

"I don't think you quite know all that happened before my husband died, Mr. Symon. I have no desire to make a newspaper story of it, and what I say to you is in confidence, if it is possible to be confidential with a police reporter."

"Judges and sweeps have relied upon my discretion, Mrs. Hoe," said Wise Symon, "and I have not failed them; perhaps I shall be asking you to keep my secrets in a minute or two."

She looked at him in surprise and smiled again.

"I don't follow you there," she said. "But if you know anything about Mr. Hoe, you will realize the kind of life I lived. My God! it was terrible!"

Her voice broke, and there came to it a note of passionate protest. "You know that he left me almost penniless?"

"Save the manuscripts," said Wise Symon, watching her face.

"Save the manuscripts," she repeated. "You know, too, that he never lost an opportunity of humbling me. People say that you should speak well of the dead. I have never understood why. Their wicked acts go on like the outward ripples of the stream long after the stone which has made those ripples has sunk to the bottom of the pond. If you may not speak ill of the dead, why should you speak well of the dead? I tell you, Mr. Symon, that Maconochie Hoe was a fiend. I could not tell anybody, even a woman, how vile this man was."

"You needn't tell me," said Wise Symon gently; "Mr. Hoe's reputation was public. And do I understand that his character explains the disappearance of your manuscripts?"

She made no reply.

"I will tell you frankly what my editor thinks, though it is not the business of a reporter," he laughed, "to give away his boss. He thinks that those last six manuscripts, which are supposed to have been stolen by 'the Ransomeers,' were in reality destroyed by you because they contained matter which was intended to humiliate you."

She looked up quickly.

"Do you share that view?"

"That's hardly fair," he countered. "Let me ask you a question: have you your husband's will?"

Again she hesitated.

"Yes," she said a little defiantly. "Would you like to see it?"

"Very much," replied Wise Symon. She left the room and came back, bearing a large, blue foolscap sheet of paper. Wise Symon read:

MY WILL AND TESTAMENT.
To my Wife I leave the Unpublished Stories of:
'Her Education.'
'She Married for Fame.',
'Her Dreams Came not True.'
'Her Humbled Pride.'
'My Daily Joy.'
'Farewell Farewell!'
'Best Hated.'
'Little Miss Nose-in-the-Air.'
MCONOCHIE HOE.
Witness: H. WALTER.

He looked from the document to her.

Mrs. Hoe," he said quietly, "you have been treated very, very badly."

"What are you going to do now?" she asked, for she read the discovery in his eyes.

"I am going to do nothing. If I were you I should go away. You have made a great deal of money by sheer merit, and I think that you have had your revenge upon the man who tried to humiliate you."

"So you do know," she said. "I'm glad! I'm glad! I found the document after his death. He used to write that way, two or three words on a line, and every other word began with a capital letter. The will he left was intended to be his final crushing blow. He had always said that it was worth my marrying him if even for the education in the humanities I gave him. You see how the will runs: *'To my wife I leave the unpublished stories of her education. She married for fame but her dreams came not true. Her humbled pride is my daily joy. Farewell! Farewell! best hated little Miss Nose-in-the-air!'* When I found this I thought of destroying it. Then an idea struck me. I took a pen and placed each phrase in quotation marks. He wrote in green ink and you can easily alter words written in green ink without detection. I scratched out the 'but' after fame and the 'is' after 'pride,' and it looked as though he had left me the manuscripts of books."

"I guessed that," said Wise Symon.

"He left me to starve!" she cried passionately. "I, who had committed no other offence than to write stories which critics had said were as good as his. When the will was published I received letters from three publishers all

offering large sums for these manuscripts, and I sat down to write the stories myself. Yes, the stories which they said were Maconochie Hoe's best, I wrote! If that man had not broken the safe, or if my publisher had not paraded the fact that these manuscripts were kept in a safe in my study, or if I had had them already written and could have produced them, all would have been well. But I have nothing to produce. I had to admit they had been stolen. Now what are you going to do?"

She was on the verge of tears and her bosom rose and fell tumultuously.

"It's a fraud," said Wise Symon, "but it's the most amiable fraud that was ever committed. Go abroad, Mrs. Hoe, and stay abroad. In three months' time you will receive a letter from a desperado of this city, a letter full of contrition and repentance. It may be ill-spelt and ungrammatical," said Wise Symon slowly, "but it will tell you the story of how a man had burgled your house earlier in the evening and had taken the six manuscripts and now returns them with prayers for your forgiveness. And then, Mrs. Hoe, you can just send along those stories to your publisher."

"But who? How?" said the bewildered girl. "How can I receive such a letter?"

"Because I shall write it," said Wise Symon cheerfully.

24: The Counselor at Crime

Roy W. Hinds

1887-1930

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MISINFORMED persons say that there is no such thing as neighborly relations in the great city of New York. Such persons will tell you that the family next door neither knows nor cares who you are or what you do—that the neighbors are oblivious equally to your good fortune and your bad fortune. If they are to be believed, you may roll in wealth or lie at the point of death from starvation, with none to envy nor to sympathize.

But this is not true. New York is observing, even prying, and in its most congested districts too, as Phineas Tutwiler, young and bookish and cautious, learned to his dismay.

Mr. Tutwiler, with certain secret things in mind, turned into Bleecker Street, which is a very old street of grubbing little business establishments, musty tenement houses, noisy pavements, and smells.

Bleecker Street touches both the slums of the East Side and the bohemianism of Greenwich Village. It is not a wide thoroughfare, yet it is filled with stir and bustle from sunrise to sunset, and for hours afterward.

It is a business street and a street of homes too. It is a playground for swarms of children who make of its clustered ash cans and gloomy doorways their forests and their caves. Children play at chalk and skipping games in Bleecker Street, but they also play at wild Indians there. When the white-clad emissaries of the streetcleaning department come into Bleecker Street to flush the cobblestones with swift streams of hose water, boys float tiny boats in the gutters and imagine them to be pirate craft.

Phineas Tutwiler, having reached his destination, gazed thoughtfully at Bleecker Street through his owlish glasses, and was pleased. He was a thin young man with a grave face and a preoccupied air, who had a mannerism of standing with his long, artistic fingers loosely dovetailed over that part of his anatomy commonly associated with cramps. Indeed, when he stood thus in meditation, one might have been excused for thinking he had a pain in his abdomen, so concentrated was his stare and so solemn his visage. It was so on this fine summer morning.

"Well, Mr. Tutwiler," came a solicitous voice from behind, "ain't you feeling well?"

Phineas Tutwiler turned in surprise.

"Feeling well?" he repeated in his soft, deferential voice. "Why, what made you ask that, Mr. Gorm?"

The elderly Mr. Gorm had emerged bareheaded from his dingy little bookshop, having seen Phineas Tutwiler standing in front, and having every reason to be nice to this young man. He rejoined:

"You looked so— so kinda solemn, Mr. Tutwiler."

"I was merely thinking," Phineas assured the old man.

"Ah, that's good," Mr. Gorm returned, with a sparkle in his eyes. "Thinking about the neighborhood, eh?"

"Yes— in a way."

"And whether you'll like it or not, eh— is that right?"

Young Mr. Tutwiler did not reply. He continued to study the street and the throngs therein and the buildings all about with an air of profound meditation. The other took advantage of this opportunity to urge:

"Now you'll like it here, I'm sure. I just know you'll like it, Mr. Tutwiler. It's crowded and noisy and all that, and it ain't very clean—but crowds mean business. Just like I told you right along, there ain't a minute there ain't somebody looking over the books on my tables here in front.

"Of course," he added hastily, feeling the necessity no doubt of making this statement jibe with the fact that the book tables were entirely deserted at the moment, "it's early yet. Folks're hustling to work— no time to stop. But wait— just wait. Folks with time to look at books don't get into the streets so early.

"They'll come— yes, yes, they'll come— and they'll buy. Other times you been here, you seen that, eh?"

"Yes," Phineas Tutwiler conceded, "you do a good business, Mr. Gorm— a good business, I may very well say." Another moment of thought, and then music to the ears of Mr. Gorm: "And I rather like tke neighborhood. Yes, I may very well say that I like it."

"Then come now," Mr. Gorm pressed, with a happy, breathless grin, "let's settle our business now— this morning. If you'll do that, I can start for the West to-morrow morning— yes, sir, to-morrow morning.

"Y'understand how anxious I am, Mr. Tutwiler— doctor's orders. I can't wait much longer, even if I hafta give the business away— and that's what I'm doing now, almost. Come now, what d'you say, eh?"

Phineas Tutwiler took a final look up and down the street, and then turned rather a lengthy gaze on the tenement house which lifted its three stories over the basement bookshop. When he lowered his eyes to the face of Mr. Gorm it was to announce:

"I came prepared to buy the shop this morning, Mr. Gorm. We should be able to handle everything by noon. It will be, as I told you, a cash proposition. I shall pay your price in full.

"I have instructed my lawyer to meet me here, and he should appear at any moment now. You may very well say that the shop will be mine the moment I have paid you for it— and I shall take possession at once. That will leave you free to make your arrangements for departure— and I sincerely hope, Mr. Gorm, that you find the health you are seeking in the West."

"Thanks, thank you, thanks! You're a fine young man, Mr. Tutwiler."

They went into the old bookshop arm in arm— Mr. Gorm happy and voluble, yet remembering to show appropriate distress over the sacrifice he was supposed to be making; Phineas Tutwiler silent, sedate, restrained, as became a young man of a studious and philosophical turn of mind who had an important enterprise ahead. Important indeed! Much more important than old Mr. Gorm suspected and the nature of which he hadn't the faintest glimmer.

AND so it happened that about noon young Tutwiler found himself in absolute and sole possession of the dingy little secondhand bookshop in Bleecker Street. He decided at once to call his place "Ye Wayfarer's Booke Shoppe"— and to have such a sign, in Old English lettering, hoisted over the front door as quickly as possible.

After he returned from lunch Mr. Tutwiler stood for a moment in the doorway of his shop, studying again the various aspects of Bleecker Street. Once more he was conscious of satisfaction.

"A busy street," he ruminated. "I may very well say that I will not be subjected to undue scrutiny here. It is such a little shop— insignificant. But I shall have no neighbors— no friendly neighbors who might pry into my affairs. That is well."

With fingers still clasped across his abdomen, the young man withdrew to the seclusion of the shop, and began to look things over again, planning and replanning various changes in the arrangements. He was to occupy a sleeping room at the rear of the shop, and a woman was already at work there tidying things up. His baggage would come along during the afternoon.

Meanwhile Phineas Tutwiler attended to the trade, of which there was a comfortable amount, and shifted books and dusted— conscious all the while of handling his own possessions, even while he thought of more important things.

As the afternoon progressed Phineas Tutwiler was somewhat disturbed to learn that his advent into the neighborhood was not without interest. The owner of a little print shop across the street sauntered over to get acquainted with Phineas Tutwiler.

Three or four women from the tenement house above, seeing him busy at the tables in front, stopped to inquire diligently into his affairs.

It was a matter of interest that old Mr. Gorm was gone. He had long been a familiar figure in the neighborhood. The proprietor of the delicatessen store next door, fat and friendly, called to pay his respects, as did others from stores thereabouts.

A HOUSEWIFE from the tenement above came in with her baby in her arms, looked around, and inquired:

"Where's Mr. Gorm at, young man?"

"Mr. Gorm is no longer here, madam," young Mr. Tutwiler replied.

"He's went an' sold out?"

"Yes, madam," with a pleasant smile; "and I am the new proprietor. Is there something I can do for you?"

She looked at him doubtfully. The baby squirmed.

"Well, I do' know," she said. "Ye look awful young, but maybe ye c'n handle him. He ain't much trouble, if ye just wiggle yer fingers in front o' his face now an' then— if he starts up to cry."

Mr. Tutwiler's heart sank.

"I don't quite understand, madam," he said weakly.

"Mr. Gorm took care o' my baby fer me when I hadda go out," the mother explained. "Three times a week, afternoons fer two hours, I go over to a house on Washington Square to sew. I ain't gone but two hours. Think ye c'n manage it, Mr. —?"

"Tut— Tutwiler is my name, madam. Ah— did I understand that you wish to leave your baby here? Here with me, madam ?"

"Yes, Mr. Tutler. His name's Alfred."

Alfred squirmed more vigorously, and made as if to cry.

"But I hardly think, madam, that I— You see, I know nothing about babies, nothing to speak of. I may very well say that I never took care of a baby in my life."

The woman's face fell.

"I do' know as ye could manage it," she admitted. "Yere so awful young. Well, I s'pose—"

The young man's heart was touched. She was a sad-looking woman. The baby had a clean, round face. He was smiling now.

"Ah, madam— you say you go out to sew? Yes, I understand. Mr. Gorm said nothing at all to me about this— no, not a word. But if you care to intrust your baby to me, I assure you that I will do my best. Yes, indeed!"

He grew more sympathetic and anxious to be of service with each word. "I may very well say," he added, "that I will exert myself in behalf of your baby. I

will give him, so far as possible, my undivided attention. You have a fine baby, madam. You say his name is Alfred?"

"Yes, Mr. Tutler—"

"Tutwiler, madam."

"Tutwiler. That's a funny name, ain't it, Mr. Tutwiler? Well, Alfred ain't a fussy baby— long's somebody's paying tenshun to him. Mr. Gorm alluz stayed in sight o' him, and just sort o' kep' talking, an' wiggling his fingers. He set him on that wide table there, an' kep' his eye peeled so's Alfred wouldn't crawl too close to the edge. He give him a book to play with too— some book he didn't care nuthin' about. Alfred's hard on books."

"I'm sure, madam, that Alfred and I will get on splendidly," Mr. Tutwiler said as he took the baby.

And they did. Yet the incident, together with the friendly calls he had received, disturbed Phineas Tutwiler. He would have to be extremely cautious. He had vital secrets to keep.

LONG toward evening, after his sleeping chamber had been freshened and put thoroughly in order and the woman had gone, Phineas Tutwiler's baggage was delivered. The first thing he unpacked was a small case containing a few treasured books. He selected one of these, and walked from his bedroom into the shop. This book was valuable neither from a standpoint of rarity nor as a piece of literature. It was old but not old enough to have taken on value because of that, and being a treatise on astronomy, it was far out of date. Had Mr. Tutwiler proposed to offer this book for sale, he would have tossed it onto a table on which there was a placard bearing the legend: "Any book on this table twenty-five cents."

As a book, it was worth just about that much. Yet this volume was destined to play an important part in the mysterious affairs of "Ye Wayfarer's Booke Shoppe."

Phineas Tutwiler stood midway of the shop. There were tall rows of shelves along each wall, so tall that a ladder was always at hand to enable one to get at the books above. There were a half dozen tables down the center of the shop. There were a few chairs for the accommodation of patrons who wished to sit and read.

The sleeping chamber behind the partition in the rear was divided in half by curtains. One half of this room contained a desk, a table, a few chairs and a shelf of books. It was there that Mr. Tutwiler proposed to transact his more important affairs.

Just now, alone, with the perpetual shadows of the shop melting into deeper gloom as evening came on, Phineas Tutwiler gave his undivided

attention to the volume labeled *Astronomy*, by Sir John Herschel. He had evidently searched this volume before, for he turned without any trouble to the page he sought. Then he plucked a pencil from an upper vest pocket and made a notation on a scrap of paper: 159— 247— 17.

That was all, yet as Mr. Tutwiler reopened the book at the appointed place, page one hundred and fifty-nine, and read the first seventeen words of the paragraph labeled in brackets two hundred and forty-seven, a smile of extraordinary satisfaction broke through the accustomed gravity of his countenance:

In this manner, then, may the places, one among the other, of all celestial objects be ascertained.

"I like that," quoth he to himself. "My mission is not exactly celestial, yet it lies in the pursuit of difficult objectives." A moment of meditation, and then: "I like it even better as I dwell upon it. I shall be here an astronomer scanning the heavens. I shall point out stars and planets to those who come to see me, and bid them look for themselves. The skies I study are earthly skies studded with stars of gold. I shall send out agents to pluck those stars." He reread the words. "Yes, I like that. I may very well say—"

At that moment the front door opened.

The visitor, coming in from the brighter atmosphere outside, did not at first perceive Phineas Tutwiler. He was a large, portly man, who wore a plaid vest and carried a heavy walking stick— an elderly man. He walked a few paces into the shop, then thumped the door with his stick, impatiently.

"Mr. Dolley," said Phineas Tutwiler, moving forward; "welcome." He had laid the book aside. "You couldn't have come at a better time," he added. "I may very well say—"

"Didn't see you there," said Mr. Dolley, in some surprise. He was rather gaudily dressed from head to foot— a walking counterpart of that breed of men who used to sell gold bricks and green goods to visitors coming in from the country. Indeed, that as well as various other forms of swindling had been Mr. Christopher Dolley's purpose in life, though he had now retired. Retired— not reformed. There is a difference. Any one familiar with the history of crime in America would recall Chris Dolley. He was known far and wide as a fast-working confidence man and swindler. But he'd been wiser than most of his kind. He had amassed a fortune, and had then resolutely refused to turn any more tricks. Christopher Dolley did not propose to die in prison.

"No, I didn't see you there," he repeated. "Well, you're started, eh? Just as you said. That's fine! And now I suppose you're ready any time, eh?"

"I may very well say that I am open for business," Phineas Tutwiler rejoined.,

"Fine!" He looked around. "It's a smoky little hole, ain't it?"

"Rather dark— yes. That partition back there cuts off the light from the rear windows. But," with a significant smile, "you and I don't mind darkness."

"Thats right— we don't," Mr. Dolley agreed. "The darker the better, for certain things. Well, what's up— what's up? Just how're you gonta start business?"

MR. TUTWILER, standing with accustomed meekness, unclasped his fingers from his belt band, glanced pointedly through his owlish glasses and led the way toward the combination sitting and bedroom in the rear. On the way he picked up the volume labeled "Astronomy."

Their earnest conference lasted nearly three hours. Mr. Dolley went away swinging his stick vigorously, which always meant one of two things— extreme pleasure or extreme impatience. In the present instance it was the former emotion that stirred him.

"Now that young fella's a nut," he soliloquized, "but there's such a thing as a clever nut in this world. He certainly's clever— and he's fulla ideas. I'll get a lotta fun outa this— and take no chances.

"Just what I been looking for— something to take up my time, and still not get right down to the business of sharping again. I'm too old for grifting but I ain't too old to play along with this pleasant little nut."

During the next few days Phineas Tutwiler continued the placid business of buying and selling secondhand books, and he became pleasantly aware of the fact that his previous observations had been a fair barometer of the business he was likely to do there. There was a steady, profitable trade— nothing miraculous, but satisfying just the same. There were numerous steady customers, some of them wealthy connoisseurs on the lookout for rare volumes.

Phineas Tutwiler was just the man for this sort of thing. He knew books, and he had a pleasant way about him.

He accepted the task of minding little Alfred for two hours three afternoons a week, and got some amusement out of it. And all the while Phineas Tutwiler was on the lookout for the first move in the game he had set on foot. He studied each customer carefully.

It was almost dusk on a Saturday afternoon when a tall, loose-jointed young man walked under the new sign, "Ye Wayfarer's Booke Shoppe." He paused just inside the door, closing it slowly behind. His steady gaze met the

gaze of Phineas Tutwiler— and Mr. Tutwiler intuitively felt that the great moment was at hand.

Yet he made no sign. He was too cautious for that. In those few moments of silence he took in the outward aspects of the visitor. He was well dressed and groomed, quietly and in good taste. An intelligent young man, Phineas Tutwiler assured himself, with a cool gray eye that spelled shrewdness and daring.

"Thought I'd drop in," the visitor said, keeping his gaze riveted on the face of Phineas Tutwiler, "and look over your books."

Mr. Tutwiler waved his arm in a comprehensive gesture.

"The shop is at your disposal," he said. "I was, just about to light things up."

He proceeded to do this while the visitor turned to the nearest shelves. Phineas Tutwiler watched him.

The newcomer hadn't so far taken down a book, but he industriously ran his eyes over the range of titles, along one shelf, then another, and a third. Mr. Tutwiler approached him obsequiously.

"Ah, are you interested in any particular kind of books?" he inquired.

"Well, now," the young man rejoined, "I got it in my head that I'd like to read up on astronomy."

THERE were no other customers in the shop. Phineas smiled, yet it was no more than a trade smile that he might turn on any. other patron. It was a curious spectacle—two men groping for an understanding, yet both too cautious to come out and say so.

"Over here," Mr. Tutwiler, suggested, "I have numerous books on astronomy. Perhaps you will find what you want—I may very well say that I'm sure you will, as my offerings are quite varied and very extensive."

He led the customer to a certain shelf, and left him there. It was up to the visitor to make the next move, and the man was not very long in so doing. He selected Sir John Herschel's *Astronomy*. He opened it, fingering the leaves a trifle clumsily, as a man unused to books, but presently found what he sought.

He appeared to be reading thoughtfully. He looked up, smiling with sudden interest, and said to Phineas:

"Here's a good line. Le' me read it to you."

Phineas stepped closer. The stranger read from the book:

" 'In this manner, then, may the places, one among the other, of all—' " He hesitated a moment at the next word, but finally achieved it with undue accent on the first syllable—" 'celestial objects be ascertained.' "

He had read not as one interested in the passage itself but as a dull schoolboy reciting a lesson. Yet Phineas extended a hand.

"I may very well say that I'm happy to make your acquaintance, Mr.—"

"Bashford's my name— Charley Bashford. Chris Dolley told me to come here, Mr. Tutwiler."

"Yes, I understand." Mr. Tutwiler's face was grave. "And could you come back, say, at nine o'clock to-night? My shop will be closed then, but I'll be on the lookout for you, Mr. Bashford."

"Yeh— sure. Nine o'clock— I'll be here." And he was. Their conference took place in the little sitting room at the rear. This was an ideal place for such a meeting. There were two windows in that room, but only one on that side of the curtain which screened the bed.

It was of course a very old house. That floor, although it was called the basement, was on the street level. The window looked out into a yard, but it was provided with a heavy shutter. Thick walls were on two sides. Toward the front was the partition with the dark spaces of the bookshop beyond.

Phineas Tutwiler had already left on this room the impress of his taste. He had replaced some of the chairs left by Mr. Gorm with handsome pieces of antique furniture. He had a new rug on the floor, and the curtain and the draperies at the windows were in harmony with that. A few well-chosen prints adorned the walls.

His bookshop customers might have been surprised if they had perceived the change in the manner and bearing of Phineas Tutwiler. He was still quiet and restrained, affable in a friendly way, but he was no longer meek and obsequious.

"Now, Mr. Bashford,' he inquired, "what is your line of work?"

"I'm a burglar."

"And your problem— tell me all about it, please, as clearly as you can. I take it that you have a problem— that you are in difficulties of some sort— and that you came to me for advice."

"That's the idea— exactly. I'm in trouble." He hesitated a moment with the characteristic wariness of his kind, but reassured no doubt by a reflection that a trustworthy friend had sent him here, he told his story: "I'm what they call a 'thick guy, " he began. "Know what I mean?"

"Ah, I can't say that I do," Phineas Tutwiler admitted. "You understand of course that I have but little acquaintance with the terms and speech of the— ah— underworld. I may very well say that I am ignorant in that respect."

"That's what Chris Dolley told me," Charley Bashford rejoined. "He said you wasn't a crook— that you never lifted even a Lincoln penny— but you had a system that beat 'em all. He said you're the guy that can pull me out of. the hole." A doubtful ring had crept into the burglar's voice. "Well, I don't know. It don't seem—"

"I presume you're worrying," Phineas put in, "because I'm not a crook— but pray don't let that disturb you. My system is good, nevertheless, as we shall see. Now Mr. Dolley wouldn't have sent you here unless—"

"Oh, that's all right," Charley Bashford hastened to say, with restored confidence. "I'm used to funny breaks— and this is a funny break, ain't it? Here I am, a burglar, a thick guy, coming to a little bird like you for a lesson— a little bird that looks like a college boy.

"Well, it's all right' Now like I said, I'm a thick guy— and that means that I tackle the heaviest and thickest safes they make. Get it now, eh? I thought you would. Well, that's it.

"They don't make 'em too thick for Charley Bashford. Course there's bank vaults that I can't touch, and there's even safes that I can't riffle— but not many. I ain't a 'piano player'— there I go, talking lingo again. I mean by piano player that I can't open a safe with only my fingers— like some guys can. You heard about them— touch artists, that figure out a combination by touch and hearing.

"No, I ain't a piano player— I'm a thick guy— and that means I hafta tear em to pieces or blow 'em, whichever's best at the time. So now you got it. I'm a burglar that specializes on safes, big fat safes with real dough in 'em— and I've struck a snag."

HE paused to light another cigarette. He resumed :

"About three weeks ago, I started to deal myself a hand Say, I gotta stop talking lingo, or you won't get me at all. Well, I mean I started to look a job over— see what I mean? Us fellas work like that— we get a squint at something that looks good, and we begin the deal, which is looking it over. That's the real work in this burgling game— looking 'em over. It takes time and it takes patience, and if a fella misses out on sumpin' in the lookover, things go flooey at the come-off.

"This box— that's what we call a safe— it was in a fella's office up in the Bronx, in one of them new office buildings. You know the kind I mean— little joints, but modern, with stores below and offices above. This fella's office is on the second floor, one flight up, right in the corner, with windows on two streets. This fella's got an insurance business—but he's got sumpin else too.

"He's a bootlegger— that's what put me next to him. Not no bootlegger that goes around with a bottle in his pocket peddling drinks, but a big-timer. He deals in case lots and truck loads. He never sees the stuff himself, I don't guess, but he's the guy that fixes the deals and collects the dough. Got a fleet of trucks and taxis working for him, and all that stuff.

"Well, he's wise. He's known in the neighborhood, and for years the business people around there knew about how much money he made in insurance and dickering in real estate maybe. He'd be a fool to spread out— now that he's got rich from bootlegging. He ain't spread out. He's making a fortune, but don't nobody know it except a few friends.

"I picked all this dope up by just snooping around. And I found out that there's nights when there's a fortune in his safe— sometimes two or three nights, till he can get down to Philadelphia, where he does his big banking. That's one of his protection stunts— not banking in New York. Way he figures it, he ain't gonta take no chances on getting tripped up with his big deposits— so he railroads clear to Philly every few days, and packs the dough away safe, in a big bank down there. ,

"But sometimes he can't get away, so all that dough lays in his safe— in that little office. And say— I can open that safe just like I'd open a can of tomatoes! It's that easy."

There was a pause. Phineas Tutwiler had 'dropped into a mood of profound meditation, Occasionally he stroked his long black hair. His eyes, behind the tortoise-shell glasses, had taken on a dreamy look.

"Well," he inquired presently, "why don't you open that safe, Mr. Bashford?"

"Now we've struck the snag," the burglar replied. He hitched his chair closer. "Chris Dolley says you can jerk me loose from the snag, but I don't see how."

HE had evidently grown doubtful again.

He couldn't be blamed for that. The inoffensive young man in front of him, so mild, so pale, so soft looking, certainly didn't seem to fit into a burglary plot, either as an actor or director. But— well, Chris Dolley had been enthusiastic, and Chris Dolley understood crime in all its various aspects.

"I don't see how," the burglar repeated, "but here's your chance. I can't go near that job because I'm being trailed by a mob of 'wheelers.' "

"Wheelers ?"

"That's it— wheelers— and I don't guess you know what wheelers are. Well, here's the dope. A fella in my business don't only hafta watch out for the cops— he's gotta look out for wheelers too. They're the guys that tag fellas like me.

"I'm a man that works alone mostly, and I got a special reason for wanting to be alone on this job. If I took some guy in with me, I'd hafta make a fifty-fifty split. If I took two guys in, itd be a three-way split, and so on. Now I don't intend to split no dough that I don't hafta— and I don't hafta on this job.

"I don't need help on the job itself— it's just a game of sneaking up that stairway some dark night— it's a building without an elevator, see— and letting myself into that office by picking the lock. I'm a bear on locks, Mr. Tutwiler— as Chris Dolley'll tell you— and I know the lock on that door.

"Oh, I looked this job over from top to bottom and across the middle— before I spotted the wheelers. Well, as I say, I don't need no help on the job itself— and I ain't gonta be squeezed by no wheelers. That's what wheelers are, Mr. Tutwiler— sneaks that trail burglars, and form a wheel around his job. And when he comes out with the dough, they close in on him and shake him down. If he don't stand for the split, there's a fight— and the police come on the run. See what I mean?"

Phineas Tutwiler nodded with interest. His education into the intricacies of crime had begun— and he was immensely pleased. .All this information would be extremely valuable to him in the enterprise he had set on foot, and of which the present problem was the first detail.

"Now I don't mind paying you your ten per cent— what Chris Dolley said you'd charge as your fee," the burglar continued, "but I'll let the job flop before I cut any wheelers in— and that's that! Yes, sir, I'll let it flop.

"Now Chris Dolley said you had a system of figuring things out—a kind of a scientific system—-that found the answer to all problems. That's by me. I don't know as I understand what it means, but anyway he said you'd—"

"There is no problem," said Phineas Tutwiler gravely, "that cannot be made to yield to an application of logic. There is no human enterprise that cannot be defeated.

"I am confident that I can circumvent these men whom you designate as wheelers —a picturesque term, I assure you. I may very well say that I can, after my information is more complete, and with a reasonable time for deliberation, tell you how to defeat the purposes of the wheelers. To carry the thing further, just as an illustration of my system, I could, after figuring out a plan to defeat the wheelers, formulate an equally workable scheme to defeat my first plan. And so on."

Charley Bashford, though he shook his head in bewilderment, was nevertheless cheered by the promise which seemed to run in the other's words.

"All right," he said. "Tell me how to trip these wheelers up."

"That," Phineas Tutwiler suggested, "can only be done after my information is more complete. Now then, Mr. Bashford— how many of these wheelers are there?"

"I seen four of 'em— fellas I know."

"And do they know exactly what you are driving at?"

"I don't guess they do— exactly. Course they know I'm after sumpin in that building, but they ain't figured out exactly what it is if I don't miss my guess. I don't see how they could. They didn't follow me in the building. They wouldn't come that close."

"Ah, then— they don't know that you have discovered their purposes, eh?"

"No— course not. It's my game to keep what I know to myself, and beat 'em when they ain't watching so hard. If they was wise that I was onto 'em, they'd be prepared, see? I covered that up."

"Splendid— splendid! And now, just how do they follow you? It isn't possible of course that you would permit these men to follow you at all times— to this place, for instance?"

"Say! I ain't that kind of a dummy. Course they didn't follow me here. They don't hafta watch me. All they hafta watch is that building, every night— waiting for me to crack down."

"Yes, yes," young Mr. Tutwiler rejoined, with measurable relief. "I didn't intend to appear doubtful of your wisdom. But— but perhaps you understand just how careful I must be. In this new life I have taken up, my safety depends on the men who come here to see me. I know that Mr. Dolley will send only the most trustworthy men, the wisest men, who will take every precaution to protect me as well as themselves. '

"You understand perhaps why I chose to set myself up in this bookshop, instead of living a life of ease in an apartment or hotel. Suspicion is easily directed toward an idler. But, you see, I have a visible means of livelihood— and I might add, I am conducting a business which I like. Too, I may very well say that I have further protected myself with the little matter of the book in the shop out there. If a man came in and told me that Mr. Dolley had sent him, I should be inclined to believe him— but I wouldn't be absolutely certain. There are ways perhaps that strangers might ascertain that Mr. Dolley and I are friends, and, suspecting something, come here and mention his name, just to see the result.

"But when a man comes in, as you did, and takes down that particular book and reads that particular passage— I may very well say that he was sent here by Mr. Dolley. There is no longer any doubt. As things go on, it will be necessary to formulate other means of' protection—indeed, I sometimes tremble to think of the intricacies and dangers into which this may. lead me. But that is a matter of the future.

"Just now we have to consider the case of Charles Bashford, burglar, versus a gang of conspirators he designates as wheelers. Now then, Mr. Bashford, you must give me a completely detailed and accurate description of this building in which you propose to exercise your skill as a burglar.

"No doubt, from looking it over, as you express it, your information is complete. You could of course draw me a little sketch of the building— I shall provide you with pencil and paper— so I may understand the nature and plan of the business establishments in the building. And the immediate neighborhood, too."

Young Phineas Tutwiler gravely produced the necessary materials.

ON a night of wind spattered with rain Charley Bashford, burglar, emerged from a subway station in the Bronx. It was late— very late. Yet Mr. Bashford was used to late hours, and he knew exactly how to efface himself in streets along which he was almost the only pedestrian.

It was a summer night, yet the wind and the rain gave him a plausible excuse for wearing a topcoat with large pockets. That was well, for large pockets are handy for the transportation of burglar's tools. A case or a Satchel is a trifle too prominent and certainly cumbersome for one who wishes at every moment to be as light and as ready for flight as a bird.

Alert and knowing exactly what he sought, the burglar's quick eyes detected a movement in the shadows of an alley. Had he been oblivious to the presence of those parasites known to hard-working burglars as wheelers, it isn't likely that he would have noticed this movement. But he was not oblivious, and like all men who know what they are looking for, he was quick to act when he saw it.

He darted into the alley. In a twinkling he had collared a man who shrank there. He twisted him around, and peered into his face.

Other men, perceiving the dash into the alley, came from their lurking places at various points around a certain building, and joined the two in the alley. In all, four men faced Charley Bashford.

He had dropped his hand from the collar of the first. There was no hint of gun play as yet, though hostilities might break out at any moment unless the burglar took the situation in hand. He did that. He surprised the four men by laughing softly, apparently in an agreeable frame of mind.

It isn't often that a burglar laughs amiably when he finds himself in the presence of wheelers.

"Just the guys I'm looking for," Bashford said. "I'm gonta put you to work."

One of the wheelers edged a trifle in front of the rest, as spokesman.

"What're yuh talkin' about?" he demanded.

His voice was threateningly low, suspicious, yet it contained a hint that he and his companions were ready for friendly relations.

"Just what I said," the burglar rejoined. "I'm gonta put you to work. Think I ain't been wise to you all along? You been heeling me three weeks now—

thinking you'd squeeze me when I cracked down on that joint over there. Well, I'm gonta crack down to-night— and you're gonta get your bit." He offered this in a tone of friendly surprise. "But you gotta earn it," he added.

"Sure," the spokesman came back, "we'll earn it. Tell us how."

"This ain't no one-man job," Bashford informed them, after they had looked around and withdrawn a little farther into the shadows. "I gotta have help on this job. I was wise-to that all along, and first I thought I'd get some of my friends in on it. But I couldn't find the fellas I wanted— so I says to myself, I'll get them wheelers in on it.

"I guess I might's well split with you guys— not because I like you, but as a matter of business. I gotta have help. There's dough enough over there to make us all rich. You're here— on the job. Well, that's plain enough, ain't it?"

THE wheelers were delighted. The situation was not unique in the world in which they lived. Other artists of the shadows had put wheelers to work when they could do so to advantage. It was, as things appeared on the surface, very much to the advantage of the burglar to work with the men he hated and held in contempt. Well, that was that.

Various rejoinders of approval greeted Bashford's proposal, and he was of course accepted as leader of the expedition.

"Now listen," he explained. "We gotta work on the street level, see— with all them big windows, on both streets. That ain't no cinch, and you guys—"

"I thought you was riggin' up a job upstairs," it was suggested. "You went up there enuff."

"Upstairs! What's upstairs? A lotta dinky offices, with about eight cents in postage stamps in their boxes. Upstairs— huh! Course I been going upstairs. How else'd I get into that joint on the corner?"

"That big real-estate place— you're cuttin' through the ceilin'?"

"Now you hit it," the burglar informed them. "I'm gonta cut through the ceiling. Well, that means work, don't it? But there's five of us, and I got the tools planted in that building— upstairs.

"We'll all go up there, see— and do the cutting. Then three of us'll drop through the hole and do the job on that big box in the real-estate office. Other two'll come outside, and do the lookout stuff."

"But that box— it's a big un. I seen it through the winders. And it's kinda open— to work on thats box."

"Now listen— I got this job sized up from all sides. Am I a good burglar or ain't I?"

"Best in the bus'ness!"

"That's enough, ain't it? Come along."

The burglar's reputation in those walks of life in which these men were more or less sneaks and outcasts was sufficient to awe them.

With due care to escape the observations of the policeman on the beat, each of these five men sneaked up the stairway of the building in question. At the end of twenty minutes all had attained the corridor on the second floor. There was no watchman in the building.

They attacked the bootlegger's office— although of course Charley Bashford was the only one in that party who knew it as such. They gained entrance by picking the lock. They stepped inside.

Charley Bashford thoughtfully locked the door behind, and put his skeleton keys in his pocket. They were locked inside the bootlegger's office— all five of them.

But there was another office in this suite, a small inner room wherein stood the heavily laden safe. A door opened into the corridor from this office too.

Charley Bashford maneuvered. The others expected him to produce the tools with which they were to cut into the realestate office below. But he did no such thing.

Instead he darted into the other room and flung the door shut behind him. It locked with a snap lock on his side, and in another moment he had shut the wheelers off from himself and at the same time held them prisoners.

"If you guys stir up a rumpus," he advised through the locked door, "the cops'll come— and you'll all fall. I got you, and I'm gonta hold you till I got my job done here. Better be quiet, or I'll flop the job and stir the cops up— leaving you here to take your medicine."

They had no way of opening the door except by smashing it, and that would draw the police. They couldn't climb out the windows, for a policeman from somewhere in those lighted streets would be sure to see them; and furthermore, they couldnt jump without injury to the cement sidewalk a full story below.

The burglar was a fast worker, and the bootlegger's safe was small. He set to work.

TWO men sat waiting in the little sitting room at the rear of "Ye Wayfarer's Booke Shoppe," in Bleecker Street. They sat in the soft light, and the smoke of a fragrant cigar was sent into the room by Mr. Christopher Dolley.

"That was a great idea," Mr. Dolley was saying. "A great idea. I hope it works."

"I may very well say that I hope so too," Mr. Phineas Tutwiler rejoined. "It is important to me. It is my first case as a counselor at crime, my first effort to subtract some of their ill-gotten wealth from the bootleggers who infest our

country. But it was an extremely simple idea that I suggested to your burglarious friend."

"Simple— yes, after a fella hears it. Like all other big ideas, it makes a fella wonder why he didn't think of it first. Point is, you figured it out.

"It'll be a big thing if it works. There's many a way to tap these bootleggers— and I'll send you the fellas who can do it. Like I told you, clever's you are at figuring things out— you could get rich if you'd go into a general business, say—"

But young Mr. Tutwiler lifted a restraining hand, and said in his gravest manner:

"I must repeat that I can't do that, Mr. Dolley. I may very well say that it would be impossible for me to lend myself to stealing from those who have acquired their money honestly. But surely there are enough bootleggers, and rich too, to provide us with riches and amusement.

"What more should we ask for? And it's much easier, if one is troubled with a conscience."

"Yeh— I expect," the retired swindler returned. "I don't know nothing much about this conscience business, but—"

At that moment they received the signal from the front of the shop which announced the return of the burglar from the Bronx. He came in laden with the riches of the illicit whisky dealer.

"I tossed them guys the skeleton keys— through the transom," he explained at the end of his thrilling narrative.

"A thoughtful thing to do," Phineas Tutwiler said solemnly. "I may very well say that that was decent of you— decidedly so."

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