PAST MASTERS 172

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PAST MASTERS 172

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 Friend of the Commune

Gilbert Parker

1862-1932

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"SEE, MADAME— there, on the Hill of Pains, the long finger of the Semaphore! One more prisoner has escaped— one more."

"One more, Marie. It is the life here that on the Hill, this here below; and yet the sun is bright, the cockatoos are laughing in the palms, and you hear my linnet singing."

"It turns so slowly. Now it points across the Winter Valley. Ah!"

"Yes, across the Winter Valley, where the deep woods are, and beyond to the Pascal River."

"Towards my home. How dim the light is now! I can only see It— like a long dark finger yonder."

"No, my dear, there is bright sunshine still; there is no cloud at all: but It is like a finger; it is quivering now, as though it were not sure."

"Thank God, if it be not sure! But the hill is cloudy, as I said."

"No, Marie. How droll you are! The hill is not cloudy; even at this distance one can see something glisten beside the grove of pines."

"I know. It is the White Rock, where King Ovi died."

"Marie, turn your face to me. Your eyes are full of tears. Your heart is tender. Your tears are for the prisoner who has escaped— the hunted in the chase."

She shuddered a little and added, "Wherever he is, that long dark finger on the Hill of Pains will find him out— the remorseless Semaphore."

"No, madame, I am selfish; I weep for myself. Tell me truly, as— as if I were your own child— was there no cloud, no sudden darkness, out there, as we looked towards the Hill of Pains."

"None, dear."

"Then— then— madame, I suppose it was my tears that blinded me for the moment."

"No doubt it was your tears."

But each said in her heart that it was not tears; each said: "Let not this thing come, O God!" Presently, with a caress, the elder woman left the room; but the girl remained to watch that gloomy thing upon the Hill of Pains.

As she stood there, with her fingers clasped upon a letter she had drawn from her pocket, a voice from among the palms outside floated towards her.

"He escaped last night; the Semaphore shows that they have got upon his track. I suppose they'll try to converge upon him before he gets to Pascal River.

Once there he might have a chance of escape; but he'll need a lot of luck, poor devil!"

Marie's fingers tightened on the letter.

Then another voice replied, and it brought a flush to the cheek of the girl, a hint of trouble to her eyes. It said: "Is Miss Wyndham here still?"

"Yes, still here. My wife will be distressed when she leaves us."

"She will not care to go, I should think. The Hotel du Gouverneur spoils us for all other places in New Caledonia."

"You are too kind, monsieur; I fear that those who think as you are not many. After all, I am little more here than a gaoler— merely a gaoler, M. Tryon."

"Yet, the Commandant of a military station and the Governor of a Colony."

"The station is a penitentiary; the colony for liberes, ticket-of-leave men, and outcast Paris; with a sprinkling of gentlemen and officers dying of boredom. No, my friend, we French are not colonists. We emigrate, we do not colonise. This is no colony. We do no good here."

"You forget the nickel mines."

"Quarries for the convicts and for political prisoners of the lowest class."

"The plantations?"

"Ah, there I crave your pardon. You are a planter, but you are English. M. Wyndham is a planter and an owner of mines, but he is English. The man who has done best financially in New Caledonia is an Englishman. You, and a few others like you, French and English, are the only colony I have. I do not rule you; you help me to rule."

"We?"

"By being on the side of justice and public morality; by dining with me, though all too seldom; by giving me a quiet hour now and then beneath your vines and fig-trees; and so making this uniform less burdensome to carry. No, no, monsieur, I know you are about to say something very gracious: but no, you shall pay your compliments to the ladies."

As they journeyed to the morning-room Hugh Tryon said: "Does M. Laflamme still come to paint Miss Wyndham?"

"Yes; but it ends to-morrow, and then no more of that. Prisoners are prisoners, and though Laflamme is agreeable that makes it the more difficult."

"Why should he be treated so well, as a first-class prisoner, and others of the Commune be so degraded here— as Mayer, for instance?"

"It is but a question of degree. He was an artist and something of a dramatist; he was not at the Place Vendôme at a certain critical moment; he was not at Montmartre at a particular terrible time; he was not a high officer like Mayer; he was young, with the face of a patriot. Well, they sent Mayer to

the galleys at Toulon first; then, among the worst of the prisoners here— he was too bold, too full of speech; he had not Laflamme's gift of silence, of pathos. Mayer works coarsely, severely here; Laflamme grows his vegetables, idles about Ducos, swings in his hammock, and appears at inspections the picture of docility. One day he sent to me the picture of my wife framed in gold— here it is. Is it not charming? The size of a franc-piece and so perfect! You know the soft hearts of women."

"You mean that Madame Solde—"

"She persuaded me to let him come here to paint my portrait. He has done so, and now he paints Marie Wyndham. But—"

"But?— Yes?"

"But these things have their dangers."

"Have their dangers," Hugh Tryon musingly repeated, and then added under his breath almost, "Escape or—"

"Or something else," the Governor rather sharply interrupted; and then, as they were entering the room, gaily continued: "Ah, here we come, mademoiselle, to pay—"

"To pay your surplus of compliments, monsieur le Gouverneur. I could not help but hear something of what you said," responded Marie, and gave her hand to Tryon.

"I leave you to mademoiselle's tender mercies, monsieur," said the Governor. "*Au revoir*!"

When he had gone, Hugh said: "You are gay today."

"Indeed, no, I am sad."

"Wherefore sad? Is nickel proving a drug? Or sugar a failure? Don't tell me that your father says sugar is falling." He glanced at the letter, which she unconsciously held in her hand.

She saw his look, smoothed the letter a little nervously between her palms, and put it into her pocket, saying: "No, my father has not said that sugar is falling— but come here, will you?" and she motioned towards the open window. When there, she said slowly, "That is what makes me sad and sorry," and she pointed to the Semaphore upon the Hill of Pains.

"You are too tender-hearted," he remarked. "A convict has escaped; he will be caught perhaps— perhaps not; and things will go on as before."

"Will go on as before. That is, the 'martinet' worse than the 'knout de Russe'; the 'poucettes', the 'crapaudine' on neck and ankles and wrists; all, all as bad as the 'Pater Noster' of the Inquisition, as Mayer said the other day in the face of Charpentier, the Commandant of the penitentiary. How pleasant also to think of the Boulevard de Guillotine! I tell you it is brutal, horrible. Think

of what prisoners have to suffer here, whose only crime is that they were of the Commune; that they were just a little madder than other Frenchmen."

"Pardon me if I say that as brutal things were done by the English in Tasmania."

"Think of two hundred and sixty strokes of the 'cat.' "

"You concern yourself too much about these things, I fear."

"I only think that death would be easier than the life of half of the convicts here."

"They themselves would prefer it, perhaps."

"Tell me, who is the convict that has escaped?" she feverishly asked. "Is it a political prisoner?"

"You would not know him. He was one of the Commune who escaped shooting in the Place de la Concorde. Carbourd, I think, was his name."

"Carbourd, Carbourd," she repeated, and turned her head away towards the Semaphore.

Her earnestness aroused in Tryon a sudden flame of sympathy which had its origin, as he well knew, in three years of growing love. This love leaped up now determinedly— perhaps unwisely; but what should a blunt soul like Hugh Tryon know regarding the best or worst time to seek a woman's heart? He came close to her now and said: "If you are so kind in thought for a convict, I dare hope that you would be more kind to me."

"Be kind to you," she repeated, as if not understanding what he said, nor the look in his eyes.

"For I am a prisoner, too."

"A prisoner?" she rejoined a little tremulously, and coldly.

"In your hands, Marie." His eyes laid bare his heart.

"Oh!" she replied, in a half-troubled, half-indignant tone, for she was out of touch with the occasion of his suit, and every woman has in her mind the time when she should and when she should not be wooed. "Oh, why aren't you plain with me? I hate enigmas."

"Why do I not speak plainly? Because, because, Marie, it is possible for a man to be a coward in his speech"— he touched her fingers— "when he loves." She quickly drew her hand from his. "Oh, can't we be friends without that?"

There was a sound of footsteps at the window. Both turned, and saw the political prisoner, Rive Laflamme, followed by a guard.

"He comes to finish my portrait," she said. "This is the last sitting."

"Marie, must I go like this? When may I see you again? When will you answer me? You will not make all the hopes to end here?"

It was evident that some deep trouble was on the girl. She flushed hotly, as if she were about to reply hotly also, but she changed quickly, and said, not unkindly: "When M. Laflamme has gone." And now, as if repenting of her unreasonable words of a moment before, she added: "Oh, please don't think me hard. I am sorry that I grieve you. I'm afraid I am not altogether well, not altogether happy."

"I will wait till he has gone," the planter replied. At the door he turned as if to say something, but he only looked steadily, sadly at her, and then was gone.

She stood where he had left her, gazing in melancholy abstraction at the door through which he had passed. There were footsteps without in the hall-way. The door was opened, and a servant announced M. Laflamme. The painter-prisoner entered followed by the soldier. Immediately afterward Mrs. Angers, Marie's elderly companion, sidled in gently.

Laflamme bowed low, then turned and said coolly to the soldier: "You may wait outside to-day, Roupet. This is my last morning's work. It is important, and you splutter and cough. You are too exhausting for a studio."

But Roupet answered: "Monsieur, I have my orders."

"Nonsense. This is the Governor's house. I am perfectly safe here. Give your orders a change of scene. You would better enjoy the refreshing coolness of the corridors this morning. You won't? Oh, yes, you will. Here's a cigarette— there, take the whole bunch— I paid too much for them, but no matter. Ah, pardon me, mademoiselle. I forgot that you cannot smoke here, Roupet; but you shall have them all the same, there! Parbleu! you are a handsome rascal, if you weren't so wheezy! Come, come, Roupet, make yourself invisible."

The eyes of the girl were on the soldier. They did the work better; a warrior has a soft place in his heart for a beautiful woman. He wheeled suddenly, and disappeared from the room, motioning that he would remain at the door.

The painting began, and for half an hour or more was continued without a word. In the silence the placid Angers had fallen asleep.

Nodding slightly towards her, Rive Laflamme said in a low voice to Marie: "Her hearing at its best is not remarkable?"

"Not remarkable."

He spoke more softly. "That is good. Well, the portrait is done. It has been the triumph of my life to paint it. Not that first joy I had when I won the great prize in Paris equals it. I am glad: and yet— and yet there was much chance that it would never be finished."

"Why?"

"Carbourd is gone."

"Yes, I know-well?"

"Well, I should be gone also were it not for this portrait. The chance came. I was tempted. I determined to finish this. I stayed."

"Do you think that he will be caught?"

"Not alive. Carbourd has suffered too much— the galleys, the corde, the triangle, everything but the guillotine. Carbourd has a wife and children— ah, yes, you know all about it. You remember that letter she sent: I can recall every word; can you?"

The girl paused, and then with a rapt sympathy in her face repeated slowly: "I am ill, and our children cry for food. The wife calls to her husband, my darlings say, 'Will father never come home?'"

Marie's eyes were moist.

"Mademoiselle, he was no common criminal. He would have died for the cause grandly. He loved France too wildly. That was his sin."

"Carbourd is free," she said, as though to herself.

"He has escaped." His voice was the smallest whisper. "And now my time has come."

"When? And where do you go?"

"To-night, and to join Carbourd, if I can, at the Pascal River. At King Ovi's Cave, if possible."

The girl was very pale. She turned and looked at Angers, who still slept. "And then?"

"And then, as I have said to you before, to the coast, to board the Parroquet, which will lie off the island Saint Jerome three days from now to carry us away into freedom. It is all arranged by our 'Underground Railway.'"

"And you tell me all this— why?" the girl said falteringly.

"Because you said that you would not let a hunted fugitive starve; that you would give us horses, with which we could travel the Brocken Path across the hills. Here is the plan of the river that you drew; at this point is the King's Cave which you discovered, and is known only to yourself."

"I ought not to have given it to you; but—"

"Ah, you will not repent of a noble action, of a great good to me— Marie?"

"Hush, monsieur. Indeed, you may not speak to me so. You forget. I am sorry for you; I think you do not deserve this— banishment; you are unhappy here; and I told you of the King's Cave-that was all."

"Ah no, that is not all! To be free, that is good; but only that I may be a man again; that I may love my art— and you; that I may once again be proud of France."

"Monsieur, I repeat, you must not speak so. Do not take advantage of my willingness to serve you."

"A thousand pardons! but that was in my heart, and I hoped, I hoped—"

"You must not hope. I can only know you as M. Laflamme, the—"

"The political convict; ah, yes, I know," he said bitterly: "a convict over whom the knout is held; who may at any moment be shot down like a hare: who has but two prayers in all the world: to be free in France once more, and to be loved by one—"

She interrupted him: "Your first prayer is natural."

"Natural?— Do you know what song we sang in the cages of the ship that carried us into this evil exile here? Do you know what brought tears to the eyes of the guards?— What made the captain and the sailors turn their heads away from us, lest we should see that their faces were wet? What rendered the soldiers who had fought us in the Commune more human for the moment? It was this:

" 'Adieu, patrie!
L'onde est en furie,
Adieu patrie,
Azur!
Adieu, maison, treille au fruit mer,

Adieu les fruits d'or du vieux mur!
Adieu, patrie,
Ciel, foret, prairie;
Adieu patrie,
Azur.' "

"Hush, monsieur!" the girl said with a swift gesture. He looked and saw that Angers was waking. "If I live," he hurriedly whispered, "I shall be at the King's Cave to-morrow night. And you— the horses?"

"You shall have my help and the horses." Then, more loudly: "Au revoir, monsieur."

At that moment Madame Solde entered the room. She acknowledged Laflamme's presence gravely.

"It is all done, madame," he said, pointing to the portrait.

Madame Solde bowed coldly, but said: "It is very well done, monsieur."

"It is my masterpiece," remarked the painter pensively. "Will you permit me to say adieu, mesdames? I go to join my amiable and attentive companion, Roupet the guard."

He bowed himself out.

Madame Solde drew Marie aside. Angers discreetly left.

The Governor's wife drew the girl's head back on her shoulder. "Marie," she said, "M. Tryon does not seem happy; cannot you change that?"

With quivering lips the girl laid her head on the Frenchwoman's breast, and said: "Ah, do not ask me now. Madame, I am going home to-day."

"To-day? But, so soon!— I wished—"

"I must go to-day."

"But we had hoped you would stay while M. Tryon—"

"M. Tryon— will— go with me— perhaps."

"Ah, my dear Marie!" The woman kissed the girl, and wondered.

That afternoon Marie was riding across the Winter Valley to her father's plantation at the Pascal River. Angers was driving ahead. Beside Marie rode Tryon silent and attentive. Arrived at the homestead, she said to him in the shadow of the naoulis: "Hugh Tryon, what would you do to prove the love you say you have for me?"

"All that a man could do I would do."

"Can you see the Semaphore from here?"

"Yes, there it is clear against the sky— look!"

But the girl did not look. She touched her eyelids with her finger-tips, as though they were fevered, and then said: "Many have escaped. They are searching for Carbourd and—"

"Yes, Marie?"

"And M. Laflamme—"

"Laflamme!" he said sharply. Then, noticing how at his brusqueness the paleness of her face changed to a startled flush for an instant, his generosity conquered, and he added gently: "Well, I fancied he would try, but what do you know about that, Marie?"

"He and Carbourd were friends. They were chained together in the galleys, they lived— at first— together here. They would risk life to return to France."

"Tell me," said he, "what do you know of this? What is it to you?"

"You wish to know all before you will do what I ask.

"I will do anything you ask, because you will not ask of me what is unmanly."

"M. Laflamme will escape to-night if possible, and join Carbourd on the Pascal River, at a safe spot that I know." She told him of the Cave.

"Yes, yes, I understand. You would help him. And I?"

"You will help me. You will?"

There was a slight pause, and then he said: "Yes, I will. But think what this is to an Englishman-to yourself, to be accomplice to the escape of a French prisoner."

"I gave a promise to a man whom I think deserves it. He believed he was a patriot. If you were in that case, and I were a Frenchwoman, I would do the same for you."

He smiled rather grimly and said: "If it please you that this man escape, I shall hope he may, and will help you.... Here comes your father."

"I could not let my father know," she said. "He has no sympathy for any one like that, for any one at all, I think, but me."

"Don't be down-hearted. If you have set your heart on this, I will try to bring it about, God knows! Now let us be less gloomy. Conspirators should smile. That is the cue. Besides, the world is bright. Look at the glow upon the hills."

"I suppose the Semaphore is glistening on the Hill of Pains; but I cannot see it."

He did not understand her.

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A FEW HOURS after this conversation, Laflamme sought to accomplish his escape. He had lately borne a letter from the Commandant, which permitted him to go from point to point outside the peninsula of Ducos, where the least punished of the political prisoners were kept. He depended somewhat on this for his escape. Carbourd had been more heroic, but then Carbourd was desperate. Laflamme believed more in ability than force. It was ability and money that had won over the captain of the Parroquet, coupled with the connivance of an old member of the Commune, who was now a guard. This night there was increased alertness, owing to the escape of Carbourd; and himself, if not more closely watched, was at least open to quick suspicion owing to his known friendship for Carbourd. He strolled about the fortified enclosure, chatting to fellow prisoners, and waiting for the call which should summon them to the huts. Through years of studied good-nature he had come to be regarded as a contented prisoner. He had no enemies save one among the guards. This man Maillot he had offended by thwarting his continued ill-treatment of a young lad who had been one of the condemned of the Commune, and whose hammock, at last, by order of the Commandant, was slung in Laflamme's hut. For this kindness and interposition the lad was grateful and devoted. He had been set to labour in the nickel mines; but that came near to killing him, and again through Laflamme's pleading he had been made a prisoner of the first class, and so relieved of all heavy tasks. Not even he suspected the immediate relations of Laflamme and Carbourd; nor that Laflamme was preparing for escape.

As Laflamme waited for the summons to huts, a squad of prisoners went clanking by him, manacled. They had come from road-making. These never heard from wife nor child, nor held any commerce with the outside world, nor

had any speech with each other, save by a silent gesture— language which eluded the vigilance of the guards. As the men passed, Laflamme looked at them steadily. They knew him well. Some of them remembered his speeches at the Place Vendome. They bore him no ill-will that he did not suffer as they. He made a swift sign to a prisoner near the rear of the column. The man smiled, but gave no answering token. This was part of the unspoken vocabulary, and, in this instance, conveyed the two words: I escape.

A couple of hours later Laflamme rose from a hammock in his hut, and leant over the young lad, who was sleeping. He touched him gently.

The lad waked: "Yes, yes, monsieur."

"I am going away, my friend."

"To escape like Carbourd?"

"Yes, I hope, like Carbourd."

"May I not go also, monsieur? I am not afraid."

"No, lad. If there must be death one is enough. You must stay. Good-bye."

"You will see my mother? She is old, and she grieves."

"Yes, I will see your mother. And more; you shall be free. I will see to that. Be patient, little comrade. Nay, nay, hush!... No, thanks. Adieu!" He put his hands on the lad's shoulder and kissed his forehead.

"I wish I had died at the Barricades. But, yes, I will be brave— be sure of that."

"You shall not die— you shall live in France, which is better. Once more, adieu!" Laflamme passed out. It was raining. He knew that if he could satisfy the first sentinel he should stand a better chance of escape, since he had had so much freedom of late; and to be passed by one would help with others. He went softly, but he was soon challenged.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Condemned of the Commune— by order."

"Whose order?"

"That of the Commandant."

"Advance order."

The sentinel knew him. "Ah, Laflamme," he said, and raised the point of his bayonet. The paper was produced. It did not entitle him to go about at night, and certainly not beyond the enclosure without a guard— it was insufficient. In unfolding the paper Laflamme purposely dropped it in the mud. He hastily picked it up, and, in doing so, smeared it. He wiped it, leaving the signature comparatively plain— nothing else. "Well," said the sentinel, "the signature is right. Where do you go?"

"To Government House."

"I do not know that I should let you pass. But— well, look out that the next sentinel doesn't bayonet you. You came on me suddenly."

The next sentinel was a Kanaka. The previous formula was repeated. The Kanaka examined the paper long, and then said: "You cannot pass."

"But the other sentinel passed me. Would you get him into trouble?"

The Kanaka frowned, hesitated, then said: "That is another matter. Well, pass."

Twice more the same formula and arguments were used. At last he heard a voice in challenge that he knew. It was that of Maillot. This was a more difficult game. His order was taken with a malicious sneer by the sentinel. At that instant Laflamme threw his arms swiftly round the other, clapped a hand on his mouth, and, with a dexterous twist of leg, threw him backward, till it seemed as if the spine of the soldier must break. It was impossible to struggle against this trick of wrestling, which Laflamme had learned from a famous Cornish wrestler, in a summer spent on the English coast.

"If you shout or speak I will kill you!" he said to Maillot, and then dropped him heavily on the ground, where he lay senseless. Laflamme stooped down and felt his heart. "Alive!" he said, then seized the rifle and plunged into the woods. The moon at that moment broke through the clouds, and he saw the Semaphore like a ghost pointing towards Pascal River. He waved his hand towards his old prison, and sped away.

But others were thinking of the Semaphore at this moment, others saw it indistinct, yet melancholy, in the moonlight. The Governor and his wife saw it, and Madame Solde said: "Alfred, I shall be glad when I shall see that no more."

"You have too much feeling."

"I suppose Marie makes me think more of it to-day. She wept this morning over all this misery and punishment."

"You think that. Well, perhaps something more—"

"What more?"

"Laflamme."

"No, no, it is impossible!"

"Indeed it is as I say. My wife, you are blind. I chanced to see him with her yesterday. I should have prevented him coming to-day, but I knew it was his last day with the portrait, and that all should end here."

"We have done wrong in this— the poor child! Besides, she has, I fear, another sorrow coming. It showed itself to me to-day for the first time." Then she whispered to him, and he started and sighed, and said at last:

"But it must be saved. By— ! it shall be saved!" And at that moment Marie Wyndham was standing in the open window of the library of Pascal House. She had been thinking of her recent visit to the King's Cave, where she had left

food, and of the fact that Carbourd was not there. She raised her face towards the moon and sighed. She was thinking of something else. She was not merely sentimental, for she said, as if she had heard the words of the Governor and Madame Solde: "Oh! if it could be saved!"

There was a rustle in the shrubbery near her. She turned towards the sound. A man came quickly towards her. "I am Carbourd," he said; "I could not find the way to the Cave. They were after me. They have tracked me. Tell me quick how to go."

She swiftly gave him directions, and he darted away. Again there was a rustle in the leaves, and a man stepped forth. Something glistened in his hands— a rifle, though she could not see it plainly. It was levelled at the flying figure of Carbourd. There was a report. Marie started forward with her hands on her temples and a sharp cry. She started forward— into absolute darkness. There was a man's footsteps going swiftly by her. Why was it so dark? She stretched out her hands with a moan.

"Oh! mother!— oh! mother! I am blind!" she cried.

But her mother was sleeping unresponsive beyond the dark-beyond all dark. It was, perhaps, natural that she should cry to the dead and not to the living.

Marie was blind. She had known it was coming, and it had tried her, as it would have tried any of the race of women. She had, when she needed it most, put love from her, and would not let her own heart speak, even to herself. She had sought to help one who loved her, and to fully prove the other— though the proving, she knew, was not necessary— before the darkness came. But here it was suddenly sent upon her by the shock of a rifle shot. It would have sent a shudder to a stronger heart than hers— that, in reply to her call on her dead mother, there came from the trees the shrill laugh of the mopoke— the sardonic bird of the South.

As she stood there, with this tragedy enveloping her, the dull boom of a cannon came across the valley. "From Ducos," she said. "M. Laflamme has escaped. God help us all!" And she turned and groped her way into the room she had left.

She felt for a chair and sat down. She must think of what she now was. She wondered if Carbourd was killed. She listened and thought not, since there was no sound without. But she knew that the house would be roused. She bowed her head in her hands. Surely she might weep a little for herself— she who had been so troubled for others. It is strange, but she thought of her flowers and birds, and wondered how she should tend them; of her own room which faced the north— the English north that she loved so well; of her horse, and marvelled if he would know that she could not see him; and, lastly, of a

widening horizon of pain, spread before the eyes of her soul, in which her father and another moved.

It seemed to her that she sat there for hours, it was in reality minutes only. A firm step and the opening of a door roused her. She did not turn her head—what need? She knew the step. There was almost a touch of ironical smiling at her lips, as she thought how she must hear and feel things only, in the future. A voice said: "Marie, are you here?"

"I am here."

"I'll strike a match so that you can see I'm not a bushranger. There has been shooting in the grounds. Did you hear it?"

"Yes. A soldier firing at Carbourd."

"You saw him?"

"Yes. He could not find the Cave. I directed him. Immediately after he was fired upon."

"He can't have been hit. There are no signs of him. There, that's lighter and better, isn't it?"

"I do not know."

She had risen, but she did not turn towards him. He came nearer to her. The enigmatical tone struck him strangely, but he could find nothing less commonplace to say than: "You don't prefer the exaggerated gloaming, do you?"

"No, I do not prefer the gloaming, but why should not one be patient?"

"Be patient!" he repeated, and came nearer still. "Are you hurt or angry?"

"I am hurt, but not angry."

"What have I done?— or is it I?"

"It is not you. You are very good. It is nobody but God. I am hurt, because He is angry, perhaps."

"Tell me what is the matter. Look at me." He faced her now-faced her eyes, looking blindly straight before her.

"Hugh," she said, and she put her hand out slightly, not exactly to him, but as if to protect him from the blow which she herself must deal: "I am looking at you now."

"Yes, yes, but so strangely, and not in my eyes."

"I cannot look into your eyes, because, Hugh, I am blind." Her hand went further out towards him.

He took it silently and pressed it to his bosom as he saw that she spoke true; and the shadow of the thing fell on him. The hand held to his breast felt how he was trembling from the shock.

"Sit down, Hugh," she said, "and I will tell you all; but do not hold my hand so, or I cannot."

Sitting there face to face, with deep furrows growing in his countenance, and a quiet sorrow spreading upon her cheek and forehead, she told the story how, since her childhood, her sight had played her false now and then, and within the past month had grown steadily uncertain. "And now," she said at last, "I am blind. I think I should like to tell my father— if you please. Then when I have seen him and poor Angers, if you will come again! There is work to be done. I hoped it would be finished before this came; but— there, good friend, go; I will sit here quietly."

She could not see his face, but she heard him say: "My love, my love," very softly, as he rose to go; and she smiled sadly to herself. She folded her hands in her lap, and thought, not bitterly, not listlessly, but deeply. She wanted to consider all cheerfully now; she tried to do so. She was musing among those flying perceptions, those nebulous facts of a new life, experienced for the first time; she was now not herself as she had been; another woman was born; and she was feeling carefully along the unfamiliar paths which she must tread. She was not glad that these words ran through her mind continuously at first:

"A land of darkness as darkness itself, and of the shadow of death without any order, and where the light is darkness."

Her brave nature rose against the moody spirit which sought to take possession of her, and she cried out in her heart valiantly: "But there is order, there is order. I shall feel things as they ought to be. I think I could tell now what was true and what was false in man or woman; it would be in their presence not in their faces."

She stopped speaking. She heard footsteps. Her father entered. Hugh Tryon had done his task gently, but the old planter, selfish and hard as he was, loved his daughter; and the meeting was bitter for him. The prop of his pride seemed shaken beyond recovery. But the girl's calm comforted them all, and poignancy became dull pain. Before parting for the night Marie said to Hugh: "This is what I wish you to do for me to bring over two of your horses to Point Assumption on the river. There is a glen beyond that as you know, and from it runs the steep and dangerous Brocken Path across the hills. I wish you to wait there until M. Laflamme and Carbourd come by the river— that is their only chance. If they get across the hills they can easily reach the sea. I know that two of your horses have been over the path; they are sure-footed; they would know it in the night. Is it not so?"

"It is so. There are not a dozen horses in the colony that could be trusted on it at night, but mine are safe. I shall do all you wish."

She put out both her hands and felt for his shoulders, and let them rest there for a moment, saying: "I ask much, and I can give no reward, except the

gratitude of one who would rather die than break a promise. It isn't much, but it is all that is worth your having. Good-night. Good-bye."

"Good-night. Good-bye," he gently replied; but he said something beneath his breath that sounded worth the hearing.

The next morning while her father was gone to consult the chief army-surgeon at Noumea, Marie strolled with Angers in the grounds. At length she said: "Angers, take me to the river, and then on down, until we come to the high banks." With her hand on Angers' arm, and in her face that passive gentleness which grows so sweetly from sightless eyes till it covers all the face, they passed slowly towards the river. When they came to the higher banks covered with dense scrub, Angers paused, and told Marie where they were.

"Find me the she-oak tree," the girl said; "there is only one, you know."

"Here it is, my dear. There, your hand is on it now."

"Thank you. Wait here, Angers, I shall be back presently."

"But oh, my dear—"

"Please do as I say, Angers, and do not worry." The girl pushed aside some bushes, and was lost to view. She pressed along vigilantly by a descending path, until her feet touched rocky ground. She nodded to herself, then creeping between two bits of jutting rock at her right, immediately stood at the entrance to a cave, hidden completely from the river and from the banks above. At the entrance, for which she felt, she paused and said aloud: "Is there any one here?" Something clicked far within the cave. It sounded like a rifle. Then stealthy steps were heard, and a voice said:

"Ah, mademoiselle!"

"You are Carbourd?"

"As you see, mademoiselle."

"You escaped safely then from the rifle-shot? Where is the soldier?"

"He fell into the river. He was drowned."

"You are telling me truth?"

"Yes, he stumbled in and sank— on my soul!"

"You did not try to save him?"

"He lied and got me six months in irons once; he called down on my back one hundred and fifty lashes, a year ago; he had me kept on bread and water, and degraded to the fourth class, where I could never hear from my wife and children— never write to them. I lost one eye in the quarries because he made me stand too near a lighted fuse—"

"Poor man, poor man!" she said. "You found the food I left here?"

"Yes, God bless you! And my wife and children will bless you too, if I see France again."

"You know where the boat is?"

"I know, mademoiselle."

"When you reach Point Assumption you will find horses there to take you across the Brocken Path. M. Laflamme knows. I hope that you will both escape; that you will be happy in France with your wife and children."

"You will not come here again?"

"No. If M. Laflamme should not arrive, and you should go alone, leave one pair of oars; then I shall know. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, mademoiselle. A thousand times I will pray for you. Ah, mon Dieu! take care!— you are on the edge of the great tomb."

She stood perfectly still. At her feet was a dark excavation where was the skeleton of Ovi the King. This was the hidden burial-place of the modern Hiawatha of these savage islands, unknown even to the natives themselves, and kept secret with a half-superstitious reverence by this girl, who had discovered it a few months before.

"I had forgotten," she said. "Please take my hand and set me right at the entrance."

"Your hand, mademoiselle? Mine is so— It is not dark."

"I am blind now."

"Blind— blind! Oh, the pitiful thing! Since when, mademoiselle?"

"Since the soldier fired on you— the shock...."

The convict knelt at her feet. "Ah, mademoiselle, you are a good angel. I shall die of grief. To think— for such as me!"

"You will live to love your wife and children. This is the will of God with me. Am I in the path now? Ah, thank you."

"But, M. Laflamme— this will be a great sorrow to him."

Twice she seemed about to speak, but nothing came save good-bye. Then she crept cautiously away among the bushes and along the narrow path, the eyes of the convict following her. She had done a deed which, she understood, the world would blame her for if it knew, would call culpable or foolishly heroic; but she smiled, because she understood also that she had done that which her own conscience and heart approved, and she was content.

At this time Laflamme was stealing watchfully through the tropical scrub, where hanging vines tore his hands, and the sickening perfume of jungle flowers overcame him more than the hard journey which he had undergone during the past twelve hours.

Several times he had been within voice of his pursuers, and once a Kanaka scout passed close to him. He had had nothing to eat, he had had no sleep, he suffered from a wound in his neck caused by the broken protruding branch of a tree; but he had courage, and he was struggling for liberty— a tolerably sweet thing when one has it not. He found the Cave at last, and with far greater ease

than Carbourd had done, because he knew the ground better, and his instinct was keener. His greeting to Carbourd was nonchalantly cordial:

"Well, you see, comrade, King Ovi's Cave is a reality."

"So."

"I saw the boat. The horses? What do you know?"

"They will be at Point Assumption to-night."

"Then we go to-night. We shall have to run the chances of rifles along the shore at a range something short, but we have done that before, at the Barricades, eh, Carbourd?"

"At the Barricades. It is a pity that we cannot take Citizen Louise Michel with us."

"Her time will come."

"She has no children crying and starving at home like—"

"Like yours, Carbourd, like yours. Well, I am starving here. Give me something to eat.... Ah, that is good— excellent! What more can we want but freedom! Till the darkness of tyranny be overpast— overpast, eh?"

This speech brought another weighty matter to Carbourd's mind. He said:

"I do not wish to distress you, but—"

"Now, Carbourd, what is the matter? Faugh! this place smells musty. What's that— a tomb? Speak out, Citizen Carbourd."

"It is this: Mademoiselle Wyndham is blind." Carbourd told the story with a great anxiety in his words.

"The poor mademoiselle— is it so? A thousand pities! So kind, so young, so beautiful. Ah, I am distressed, and I finished her portrait yesterday! Yes, I remember her eyes looked too bright, and then again too dull: but I thought that it was excitement, and so— that!"

Laflamme's regret was real enough up to a certain point, but, in sincerity and value, it was chasms below that of Hugh Tryon, who, even now, was getting two horses ready to give the Frenchmen their chance.

After a pause Laflamme said: "She will not come here again, Carbourd? No? Ah, well, perhaps it is better so; but I should have liked to speak my thanks to her."

That night Marie sat by the window of the sitting-room, with the light burning, and Angers asleep in a chair beside her— sat till long after midnight, in the thought that Laflamme, if he had reached the Cave, would, perhaps, dare something to see her and bid her good-bye. She would of course have told him not to come, but he was chivalrous, and then her blindness would touch him. Yet as the hours went by the thought came: was he, was he so chivalrous? was he altogether true?... He did not come. The next morning

Angers took her to where the boat had been, but it was gone, and no oars were left behind. So, both had sought escape in it.

She went to the Cave. She took Angers with her now. Upon the wall a paper was found. It was a note from M. Laflamme. She asked Angers to give it to her without reading it. She put it in her pocket and kept it there until she should see Hugh Tryon. He should read it to her. She said to herself as she felt the letter in her pocket: "He loved me. It was the least that I could do. I am so glad." Yet she was not altogether glad either, and disturbing thoughts crossed the parallels of her pleasure.

The Governor and Madame Solde first brought news of the complete escape of the prisoners. The two had fled through the hills by the Brocken Path, and though pursued after crossing, had reached the coast, and were taken aboard the Parroquet, which sailed away towards Australia. It is probable that Marie's visitors had their suspicions regarding the escape, but they said nothing, and did not make her uncomfortable. Just now they were most concerned for her bitter misfortune. Madame Solde said to her: "My poor Marie— does it feel so dreadful, so dark?"

"No, madame, it is not so bad. There are so many things which one does not wish to see, and one is spared the pain."

"But you will see again. When you go to England, to great physicians there."

"Then I should have three lives, madame: when I could see, when sight died, and when sight was born again. How wise I should be!"

They left her sadly, and after a time she heard footsteps that she knew. She came forward and greeted Tryon.

"Ah," she said, "all's well with them, I know; and you were so good."

"They are safe upon the seas," he gently replied, and he kissed her hand.

"Now you will read this letter for me. M. Laflamme left it behind in the Cave."

With a pang he took it, and read thus:

DEAR FRIEND,— My grief for your misfortune is inexpressible. If it were possible I should say so in person, but there is danger, and we must fly at once. You shall hear from me in full gratitude when I am in safety. I owe you so many thanks, as I give you so much of devotion. But there is the future for all. Mademoiselle, I kiss your hand.
Always yours,
RIVE LAFLAMME.

"Hugh!" she said sadly when he had finished, "I seem to have new knowledge of things, now that I am blind. I think this letter is not altogether real. You see, that was his way of saying-good-bye."

What Hugh Tryon thought, he did not say. He had met the Governor on his way to Pascal House, and had learned some things which were not for her to know.

She continued: "I could not bear that one who was innocent of any real crime, who was a great artist, and who believed himself a patriot, should suffer so here. When he asked me I helped him. Yet I suppose I was selfish, wasn't I? It was because he loved me."

Hugh spoke breathlessly: "And because— you loved him, Marie?"

Her head was lifted quickly, as though she saw, and was looking him in the eyes. "Oh no, oh no," she cried, "I never loved him. I was sorry for him— that was all."

"Marie, Marie," he said gently, while she shook her head a little pitifully, "did you, then, love any one else?"

She was silent for a space and then she said: "Yes— Oh, Hugh, I am so sorry for your sake that I am blind, and cannot marry you."

"But, my darling, you shall not always be blind, you shall see again. And you shall marry me also. As though— life of my life! as though one's love could live but by the sight of the eyes!"

"My poor Hugh! But, blind, I could not marry you. It would not be just to you."

He smiled with a happy hopeful determination; "But if you should see again?"

"Oh, then...."

She married him, and in time her sight returned, though not completely. Tryon never told her, as the Governor had told him, that Rive Laflamme, when a prisoner in New Caledonia, had a wife in Paris: and he is man enough to hope that she may never know.

But to this hour he has a profound regret that duels are not in vogue vogue among Englishmen.

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2: Cousin Geoffrey's Chamber

Mrs. Henry Clifford (*Elizabeth de la Pasture*)
1866-1945
London Society Christmas 1868
Reprinted 1887 as "The Secret of Cousin Geoffrey's Chamber"

The mother of Edmée de la Pasture, who wrote as E. M. Delafield (de la Pasture = Delafield)

"THERE ARE Annie and Margaret Ducie— that makes two and the Ladies Lascelles, five: I don't see how we can squeeze in another young lady, by any possibility!"

Mrs. Pagonel was the speaker; and it was the sixth time that Beatrice and I had heard her say this, always winding up with a piteous appeal to us.

"Girls, what am I to do?"

"Really, mother dear, I don't see what you can do," said Beatrice. "except just write and say the truth, and that we are very sorry and so forth."

"What's the trouble, mother?" asked Hugh Pagonel, appearing in the doorway, ready equipped for his day's shooting.

"Oh! my dear, didn't you hear at breakfast? Those tiresome Mortons— at least they are charming people, I'm sure— only it is inconvenient— they have written to ask if they may bring a young lady, a niece of theirs, to stay here for the New Year's Eve Ball."

"Oh! never mind, mother, pack her in somehow or other, can't you? The more the merrier! Let her take my room, and I could have a shake-down anywhere."

"You are the kindest of boys," his mother said, looking fondly up at his stately height and bright, good-tempered face; "but it would be of no use, my dear, thank you. I could not offer a young lady a room in the bachelors' row, up a separate staircase and all: impossible! and it wouldn't do to make room for her by putting a maid there. No, no, I really must write, as Beatrice proposes, only it does so vex your father to seem inhospitable."

"Can't Bee and Katie put up together for those two nights?"

"Katie is to be badly enough quartered as it is," said Mrs. Pagonel, smiling at me; we mean to put her into that little oak cupboard, which really is too small to turn round in, and Bee will give up her room to the Miss Ducies, and sleep in my dressing closet. It is wonderful how little accommodation there is in this great rambling place.

"Well, I can only see one thing to be done, mother," said Hugh; "give Miss What's-her-name the choice of staying away, or sleeping in Cousin Geoffrey's chamber."

"Really, mamma, we never thought of that," said Beatrice; "it is never used as a sitting-room— why not put a bed there for once? You don't really believe that it is haunted, do you?"

"Not exactly, but such a dreary room, and on the ground floor away from everybody. I could hardly put a guest there."

"No, mamma, I never thought of your putting a guest there; but why should not Miss Morton sleep in your dressing closet? She must put up with close quarters and I will have the little stretcher bed put into Cousin Geoffrey's room."

"My dear child, I would not on any account risk your nerves meeting with any shock."

"My nerves are in no danger, mother, I assure you," said Beatrice, in her quiet, rather demure manner. "I don't believe in ghosts."

"That is no reason why you should not be afraid of them," I remarked; "you had much better let me sleep in the haunted room. I do believe in ghosts, you know, and I should not at all mind seeing one; it would be great fun."

"I think we have used you ill enough already, Katie," said Mrs. Pagonel; "we don't treat you much like a visitor," and, with her sweet smile, she held out to me a hand, which, with its delicacy and look of exquisite keeping, its soft palm and nervous fluttering fingers, always seemed to me so like herself, and her whole character. I had by no means lost my childish pleasure in admiring it, and in fingering her many bright rings, and I took it into both my own hands as I answered her last speech.

"Indeed, I should hope not! No place ever seems half so like home as dear old Ernscliff."

"We'll settle it as I proposed, please, mamma," Beatrice said, with the sober, well-judged decisiveness which she usually brought to the rescue in her mother's many small worries and uncertainties. "I will take all the trouble if you will let me, and I will go at once and desire Mrs. White to see that the room is well aired before the thirty-first."

And, after making an orderly arrangement of her work, she left the room.

"I'm off too, now, mother," said Hugh, who had waited good-naturedly to see if he could be of any use.

"Bee is a capital girl, isn't she? she always hits on the right thing; and if she should see the ghost, I hope she'll ask him where the treasure is; for, by Jove, it's wanted!"

He left the room; and his words, light as they were, called up a deep sigh from his mother, of which I partly knew the cause, for I was too much like a child of the house not to be aware that there were money embarrassments at Ernscliff Castle, which weighed heavily upon them all The dear old squire, the

kindest, but not the wisest of men, had been led into foolish speculations, which had resulted in severe losses.

To meet these demands he had been obliged to effect a heavy mortgage on his estate; and the loss of income which this involved could not fail of being a serious annoyance and difficulty to a family like the Pagonels warm-hearted, open-handed people, with a considerable position in the county to keep up, with the endless expenses belonging to a large estate, and with numerous traditions of hospitality and charity, to break through any of which would have broken Squire Pagonel's heart as well. I knew that Mrs. Pagonel had been anxious that the New Year's gathering of county neighbours, which was one of the institutions of Ernscliff Castle, should not take place this year; but her husband could not bear to give it up, especially as Hugh, whose birthday fell on the last day of the year, was to come of age, and his father had long determined that this event should be celebrated by a ball.

"Let us economize in some other way," he had said, as his custom was, and as his wife knew that he would say again when she should demur to a month in London, or a trip to Scotland, or any other pet scheme which involved the spending of money. So, with a little sigh, she had resigned herself, only trying feebly to introduce little economical amendments into the arrangements, to which, of course, the old servants opposed all their *vis inertiae*, and which would never have been carried through, but for Beatrice's marvellous gift of managing everything and everybody. She had, as usual, been head in all the plans, and I had tried to be hands and feet; for, as I have already said, I was like another daughter of the house, though our relationship— for we did "call cousins"— was of the vaguest and most distant kind. My father, General Seaton, and Mr. Pagonel of Ernscliff, had been schoolfellows and brother officers; and their friendship had been cemented by the marriage of both, within a few years of each other, with two girls, distant relations, who had been brought up together.

My father and mother had been for the last ten years in India, and I had been left under the care of an excellent kind hearted lady who took a small number of pupils, and under whose roof I had led a healthy and satisfactory life enough; but Ernscliff, where I spent all my holidays, was the home of my heart; and it made me sad to think that this was probably my last visit there for many years, as I was to join my father and mother in India in a few months' time.

It was a place to attach any child, and especially an imaginative one like myself, used to the monotonous confinement of a London square. The park was wild in the extreme, a wide stretch of wood and hill and moorland, and the castle was a heavy dark-red mass of building, standing at the very edge of a

steep descent, at the foot of which nestled the quaint little old-fashioned village, so directly below, that a stone could easily have been thrown from one of the castle windows down straight into the marketplace. Inside it was a queer rambling house, full of narrow pas sages, and large long vaulted rooms, and unexpected staircases round dangerous corners, leading to haunted-looking attics and ranges of dungeon-like cellars; charming for hide-and-seek, as we had often found, Hugh and Beatrice and I. The entrance-hall was of dark oak, with a stone floor, and with two heavy arched doors leading from it to the dining-room and library, and a third, rarely opened, which belonged to the room I have mentioned before— the blue chamber of the house— the haunted apartment known as Cousin Geoffrey's room. A gloomy, gruesome place it certainly was, partly because it had never, for generations, been made use of, so that it had gradually become a sort of hospital for disabled furniture and a receptacle for lumber. It took its share in the quarterly sweepings and scrubbings; but at other times I do not think the housemaids frequented it much; and, though I never heard any well-authenticated story of ghostly sights or sounds being seen or heard there, there was a vague horror of the place, which, as well as its quaint name, had been handed down from generation to generation among the traditions of Ernscliff Castle.

When Hugh had gone out shooting, and Mrs. Pagonel had settled herself to her note-writing, I fell to musing on all I had ever heard of this room, and I was surprised to find how very little it was. The subject had hardly ever been mentioned before us in our nursery days; and I knew that Mrs. Pagonel, who believed everyone's nerves to be as delicately irritable as her own, would not encourage its discussion now; but I resolved, on the next opportunity, to ask Beatrice or Hugh to tell me who was this dead and gone Cousin Geoffrey, who was supposed to haunt the chamber to which he had given his name.

The opportunity soon came. Dinner-hours in those days were earlier than they are now, and the blessed institution of five o'clock tea did not yet exist; but Beatrice was in advance of her age in this respect, and she had infected me with her propensity for tea-drinking at irregular hours. It had become a practice with her and me to find ourselves, in the dusk of the winter afternoons, on the large rug of furs which was spread before the wide old-fashioned hearth in the entrance-hall: there, crouching in the corners, out of the blaze and into the warmth, we used to sit and chat, and drink tea, which we waylaid on its road from the kitchen to the housekeeper's room; and there Hugh would often join us, glad to sit and rest before dressing-time, though his mud coated gaiters and damp shooting-jacket were not presentable in the civilized drawing-room regions. Those hours were some of the most delightful in my many happy days at Ernscliff; it was so easy to talk, so charming to listen,

while the red firelight through weird glares and ghostly shadows across the dark hall, and while a cheerful accompaniment was kept up by the crackling logs and the click of Beatrice's never-idle knitting needles.

On this evening we assembled rather earlier than usual, with aching arms and sore fingers, after a busy afternoon spent in dressing the castle with holly, in honour of the approaching Christmas.

As we drew round the fire, Hugh, who had good-naturedly come in early in order to help us in our task, asked his sister if her arrangement held good for New Year's Eve.

"Yes," she answered, smiling; "the mother was rather afraid about the ghost; but it is the best plan, and I am quite willing to take the risk."

"I wish I knew the real story about that room," said I; "it was always tabooed in the nursery, and I have only heard bits and scraps of it; tell it me, Bee, won't you?"

"I would with pleasure, but I really do not know it," said Beatrice, demurely. "I don't take much interest in ghost stories."

"I can't make out that there is any ghost in the case," said Hugh; "but the other day, when I had to look up a lot of musty old family papers, I read the whole history of the man who used to live in that room. He didn't begin life as a ghost, you know."

"Oh! then, do tell it nicely, and make a story of it," I said, cowering closer into my corner, in expectation of something delightfully horrible.

"Well, it dates back to the days of Queen Bess. The Pagonels of that time— not our branch of the family, you know— had the ill-luck to be Papists, and, after being rather in favour as long as Mary reigned, they found themselves quite in a wrong box after her sister came to the throne. The family consisted of two brothers, Ralph, the possessor of Ernscliff, and Geoffrey, the younger, who, I believe, had hung about the house contentedly enough, doing everything that nobody else chose to do, as younger brothers did in those days, till there was some trouble between them about a certain beautiful cousin, one Beatrix Pagonel, who had been brought up with them both, and whom they both fell in love with."

"Which did she like best?"

"She liked the eldest brother best, like a well-brought-up young woman."

"In this instance I don't much wonder, for, judging by their portraits, Ralph had the best of it. That is his picture over there; it is too dark to see it now, but you remember what a fine, handsome face it is."

"I would not praise it, if I were you," said Beatrice, smiling, "for it is the image of yourself."

"I'm glad I'm so good-looking. I only hope I shan't live to be hanged like my ancestor."

"Hanged? What had he done?"

"You shall hear. The Pagonels stuck to their faith when times changed, the only alteration being that their old chaplain disappeared for a little while, and then reappeared in the character of secretary and house-steward— a very transparent deceit I should think, but I dare say nobody wished to get the family into trouble. Now the story goes that somewhere in the intricacies of the castle there was a hiding-hole, so remote and so skilfully concealed that it defied discovery; the secret of which used to be in the possession of the head of the family, and of one confidant only chosen by himself. It is said that even the political or religious fugitives who had sometimes taken shelter there had been led to and from it blindfold, such was the jealousy with which the Pagonels guarded their precious secret. In Ralph Pagonel's day he had chosen for his confidant his brother Geoffrey; and, trusting to this place of refuge, where the old priest and all his pious belongings could be stowed away at a moment's notice, they practised their religion more fearlessly than most folks of their persuasion in the glorious days of good Queen Bess. At last, a few years after Ralph's marriage, the coolness between him and Geoffrey seems to have ended in an open rupture. Ralph Pagonel turned Geoffrey out of doors, with high words, which I have no doubt he deserved, and Geoffrey went off, vowing to be revenged on his brother."

"Oh! I know what he is going to do— he gave information."

"When next the little congregation at Ernscliff assembled for prayers, one who was always on the watch on these occasions came to give notice that the sheriff's officers were in the neighbourhood. When they arrived, everything was prepared to receive them, and Mr. Pagonel and his wife welcomed them politely, trusting to baffle them, as they had done before; but fancy their dismay and their fury, when they saw Geoffrey appear, bringing with him the poor old priest and all the sacred vessels which had been hidden in the hiding-hole of which he only knew the secret!"

"Wretched man! no wonder he can't rest in his grave."

"I don't know that he ever had a grave."

"Is he still living then, like the Wandering Jew? I hope he won't come back someday and claim the estate, Hugh."

"Wait till you hear the end. How far all these ins and outs are true I can't tell, but it is certain that Ralph and Beatrix Pagonel, and Francis Rivers, priest, are among those who died on the scaffold, and that Geoffrey was permitted to take possession of the estate in consideration of good service rendered to the Crown. He seems to have led a most miserable life here, shunned by

everybody as a traitor and a fratricide, and to have shut himself up at last quite alone in the castle, in that dreary room, having driven even his servants away.

"I don't feel as if I could pity him. He was supposed to have become a great miser, for he squeezed all he could out of his tenants; and it was believed that vast sums were accumulated in the castle while he lived here; but when our branch of the family took possession they found not a coin in the house and no signs of wealth— not even a trace of the family plate or jewels, which had been extremely valuable."

"When did your people come into the estate?"

"When this wretched man disappeared mysteriously, which he did at last. There is no record among the papers of the exact way in which his absence was first discovered; probably from his queer hermit way of life, not for a long time; but after some months had elapsed his cousin, our ancestor, came and took possession.

"Where can the hiding-hole be?" I asked.

"To tell you the truth, I don't believe it ever existed. There are no end of closets and corners in all parts of the house, as you know, where a person who knew the place well could play at hide-and-seek very cleverly with a stranger; I fancy that is the origin of the story."

"And has anyone ever seen this horrible Cousin Geoffrey?"

"I never heard of his being seen, but I have no doubt the horror which was felt for him caused his room to be shut up; and that of course would lead to all kinds of stories; and then there was a great belief that he had left a treasure buried somewhere, and might appear in approved ghost fashion to show its whereabouts."

"O Bee, what a chance for you!" Beatrice laughed, and said she was in no way desirous of an interview with her unpleasant ancestor, though she added with a sigh: "Anything short of that I would go through for the chance of finding the treasure."

"Ah! and wouldn't I?" said Hugh. "I can't bear to see the dear old squire look so careworn. I'd do anything to put things square for him."

"Not *anything*, Hugh?" his sister said, with emphasis; and I saw in the firelight how the colour mounted to his forehead as he answered:

"What do you mean? Why do you say that?"

"Because I know there are some things which you would not do for anyone," she answered. "Did you hear mamma say that Miss Barnett is coming to the ball with the Lascelles?"

I didn't know why the name of the great Blankshire heiress struck unpleasantly on my ear, but it certainly did, and Hugh's free, gay laugh had never been so welcome.

"Oh! no, hang it," he answered; "we are not quite come to that: I'd sooner have—"

"My hollow tree,

My crust of bread and liberty."

There was a pause, and his tone was quite grave and sad, when he said a moment after:

"But at all events, I'll never do anything to add to his cares— God helping me."

Nobody spoke, and we all sat and looked at the fire, and I felt— I don't know how. Hugh Pagonel had always been very dear to me; all, and more than all that our close intimacy warranted— brother, companion, champion; but I had never thought of him in any other light; and when, with the shy consciousness of my seventeen years, had come the feeling that our friendship could not be as close and free as that of myself and Beatrice, I had been more irritated and chafed than confused by the conviction. But the idea which Beatrice had suggested was strangely distasteful to me; it made me realize how dreary it would be to see Hugh married to another woman; and I found myself recollecting with a pang that my father had no fortune independent of his profession, and that for Hugh to marry a penniless wife would be to take the surest way of adding to the squire's embarrassments. As I raised my eyes I met Hugh's fixed upon me with a look as sad and earnest as my own could have been. For the first time, his gaze confused me, and it was a relief when the sound of the great clanging house-bell scattered us in our different directions to dress for dinner.

ii

ON NEW YEAR'S EVE the guests assembled for the coming-of-age ball that night, and to stay over the next day, when a tenants' supper was to take place. There is no need to describe them; they were pleasant, good-natured people, most of them old friends and neighbours of the Pagonels: and, as I had met them, year after year, during my holiday visits at Ernscliff, they were all kind in their notice of me, and civil in their regrets at hearing that this was my last stay there before leaving England. The only stranger, besides the Miss Morton whose coming had caused so much discussion, was Miss Barnett, the heiress, who came with the Lord Lieutenant's party from Lascelles Acres. I could not help looking at her with much interest, and I am afraid I felt an uncharitable vexation at finding her to be a remarkably sweet-looking girl, very young, and simple in appearance and manner, and so unaffectedly delighted with the grand old castle, and the wide expanse of park through which they had driven,

that I could almost have accused her, spitefully, of wishing to win Hugh's heart by praising the home which he loved so dearly. With my childish notion of what an heiress must be like, I was rather surprised to see her dressed in a sober, dark-coloured linsey, and coarse straw bonnet of the plainest kind; but, when we all went to dress after dinner, I heard Lady Lascelles telling Mrs. Pagonel that she had "persuaded Isabella to bring her jewels, as she thought they really were worth seeing;" and accordingly she entered the great drawing-room where we were to dance blazing with diamonds, which gleamed from the bosom of her white lace dress, and shone like stars in her thick plaits of light brown hair. She blushed a little when they were admired by all who felt intimate enough to speak of them to her, and anxiously explained that Lady Lascelles had made her wear them, as if she dreaded being supposed to have herself wished to make the display; and again I felt unreasonably annoyed— angered— at the pretty diffident manner which formed such a piquant contrast to her gorgeous ornaments, and cruelly mortified when a glance at the mirror showed me my tall figure in a dress of the simplest muslin (manufactured by my own fingers under the superintendence of Mrs. Pagonel's maid), and my dark hair with a simple wreath of holly laid across it. The consciousness that my face was wreathed into a peculiarly crabbed and unlovely form warned met to recover my temper, and try to acquire something less unlike the sweet looks of the heiress; and I turned away from the mirror and endeavoured to throw myself into the interest of the moment.

The ball began and went on with great spirit: I had plenty of partners, and should have enjoyed myself thoroughly, if it had not been that Hugh did not once dance with me— a state of things unprecedented at any of the Ernscliff festivities since I was seven years old. Last year I should have taken him to task for his neglect as fearlessly as if he had been my brother; now I could only fret inwardly while I tried to assume an extra gaiety of manner whenever he was near me, especially if Miss Barnett was his partner.

The result was that I was thoroughly tired before the end of the evening, and heartily glad when I heard the guests who were not staying at Ernscliff order their carriages; and, when the squire insisted that the ball should wind up with Sir Roger de Coverley, I stole away into a small room adjoining the drawing-room, and always known as the "spirit chamber"— not, I believe, from any ghostly association, but simply from the preference of the Pagonel ancestry for having something at hand, Gamp-like, to which they "could put their lips when so disposed." It was fitted up as a little boudoir, and there I found Beatrice alone, looking so blue and cold, that I exclaimed at the sight.

"What have you been doing to yourself, Bee? You look like a ghost."

"Don't talk about ghosts!" she said, with a little shiver; "I am so ashamed of myself, Katie! I have a regular fit of *nerves* upon me tonight— so unlike me!"

"Are you not well, dear Bee?"

"Quite; but it is so foolish! You know I can't dance long without getting a pain in my side, and it is the same with Margaret Ducie; so we came in here to rest, and then our partners would come with us; and somehow they began asking about the family pictures in the hall, and that led to talking about Cousin Geoffrey's room, and they made me tell the story."

"And you frightened yourself? Oh! Bee, what a triumph! I thought you were much too wise to care for ghosts or goblins."

"That didn't frighten me; but then Margaret told us their horrible Ducie ghost-story, and Captain Lascelles capped it with something worse. You know I always dislike that sort of ghost talk, which seems to me such waste of time and trial of nerves for nothing; but I could not stop it, and none of them knew that I was to sleep in that dreary, lonely room tonight."

"And you shan't sleep there," I cried; "you shall have my room, Bee, darling. I shan't mind sleeping downstairs in the least."

"No; I'm not quite so selfish as that," she said. "I shall be all right when I get to bed and to sleep; I can't think why I have such a silly fit; it is very unlike me, I flatter myself— very odd."

"Not odd at all, my dear, when you consider that you were up at five this morning dressing the supper-table, and have been hard at work ever since. You may have prodigious strength of mind, but in body you are not a Hercules; and nerves belong to the body, don't they?"

The dance was over, the guests departing; and we had to emerge from our retreat. At the door Hugh was standing, leaning against the wall, and looking gloomy enough, but gazing fixedly across the room. Following his eyes I saw, with a thrill of pain, that they were riveted on Miss Barnett, who was looking peculiarly soft and attractive as she stood listening to Captain Lascelles, the light flashing from her splendid jewels.

"Do you admire her, Hugh?" I heard Beatrice whisper.

"I admire her jewels," he answered; "but her hair is hardly dark enough to set them off. Wouldn't they look well in black hair? I certainly do like diamonds."

"Most people do," his sister said, smiling.

"I wish I thought that I should ever be able to dress up my wife in such jewels as those," he answered.

"Well," she glanced with her demure gravity at his face, "you know the way, Hugh; faint heart never won fair lady."

"Ah! but the jewels must be of my giving, or I shouldn't value them a bit," he said; and as he moved off to hand some lady to her carriage, I felt my heart wonderfully lightened, and was ready to respond cordially when Beatrice began to sing Miss Barnett's praises.

It was some time before the various guests were shown to their rooms; but as soon as they had disappeared in their different directions I drew Beatrice into the little closet where I was to sleep. She was looking white and over tired; and though well aware that it was not easy to persuade her to relinquish a plan, I was determined that she should not pass the night in that dreary room downstairs.

"Beatrice," I began, trying to be very authoritative, "I am going to help you out of your dress, and wrap you up in my dressing-gown, and then I shall carry my goods downstairs and bring yours up. I am quite determined to change places with you tonight."

"You shall do nothing of the kind, Katie: I am quite ashamed of myself as it is, but you can't suppose I'm quite so selfish!"

"Selfish? but really and truly I should enjoy the fun. You know I like an adventure, and here is the chance of one for me; and I am not feeling in the least nervous tonight."

"I wouldn't on any account. Couldn't we both squeeze in here for this short part of a night?"

And she glanced at the tiny bed which had been with difficulty wedged in from wall to wall of the little cell. I laughed at the idea, but was charmed to see this sign of wavering; and by a few more vehement words I carried my point, for indeed Beatrice was over-tired and unhinged, and had not the strength to oppose me. In one thing, however, she was unpersuadable; she insisted on helping me to carry down my garments, and on seeing me safely installed in my apartment This I allowed her to do, knowing that the servants were still about, and that therefore her night journey through the gloomy house would not be as eerie as it sounded.

The door of Cousin Geoffrey's room gave a dismal creak as it swung back on its rusty hinges, and the candle which each of us carried only made the great cavern of darkness look more impenetrable. Truly it was a dreary room, even apart from the memories of sin, and remorse, and lonely wretchedness which seemed to hang heavily about it. Like most rooms in Ernscliff Castle, it was panelled with oak: the window recesses were of such depth as to form small rooms, testifying to the immense thickness of the walls, and were only half concealed by the scanty curtains, so fusty and ragged that I think they must have come down from the days of Cousin Geoffrey himself. There was a dreary array of dilapidated chairs, broken tables, and odds and ends of

furniture banished for their ugliness from the more civilized parts of the house, and a space had been cleared in the middle for the light stretcher— a reminiscence of the squire's campaigning days— for a hastily-arranged dressing table and a sponging-bath— the latter an essentially everyday, nineteenth-century affair, which was quite a cheering sight amidst so much dilapidation and decay. The house-maid had forgotten, or had been afraid to visit the room since dark, and the logs on the hearth had smouldered them selves away. This was the first thing which struck Beatrice, and with a shiver she exclaimed

"Oh, dear, they have let the fire out! how excessively dreary!"

"Never mind," I cried, "it is all *en règle*; much more ghostified than if it were warm and light, like any commonplace room. Now, Bee, make haste to bed. Here, bundle all these things over your arm— good-night."

"I can't bear to leave you," she said, lingering; but my spirit was now thoroughly made up to the adventure, and I would not hear of giving it up. I laughed at all Beatrice's demurs and scruples, told her that she would be a ghost herself if she stayed any longer shivering in the cold; and finally dismissed her, saying, as I gave her a last kiss, and saw her wistful, troubled look at me: "My dear, you needn't make yourself unhappy! you know I don't possess nerves— I never was afraid of anything in my life."

Foolish, boastful words, which I had often said before, but which I was never to say again!

iii

AS THE last sound of Beatrice's receding footsteps died away, I did feel rather lonely and queer; but rallying my spirits, and telling myself that it was "capital fun," as Hugh would have said, I began bustling about and preparing for bed, without leaving myself time to get nervous. I was soon out of my ball-dress, and in my warm dressing gown and fur-lined slippers, which felt very comfortable in that cold, cellar-like atmosphere. The unplaiting of my hair was a longer business, and I could not help falling into a reverie as I sate opposite the glass, and forgetting cold and fright and all things in speculating as to whether Hugh would, after all, repair the family fortunes by marrying Miss Barnett. With an ingenuity in self-torture which never, I think, exists in perfection except at seventeen, I built a series of most gloomy castles in the air— saw Hugh married to the heiress; Beatrice settled far from Ernscliff, and the dear old place closed against me forever; and then I indulged in a hearty fit of the dismals over my own future— in a strange country, and with parents who were little more to me than a vague memory and a name. I sat mournfully

gazing into the depths of the looking-glass, when I suddenly found that a pair of gloomy painted eyes, from the wall behind, were looking back at me with the earnest, solemn gaze which always lives in the fixed eyes of a picture.

I hastily turned and looked at the portrait, which I had not noticed before, but on which the rays of my candle happened now to fall. It represented a young man, not uncouth to look upon, though there was a peering, near-sighted contraction about the eyes, and a sort of suppressed sneer on the mouth, which gave an unpleasant expression to the otherwise handsome features. No doubt this was the wretched Geoffrey Pagonel: whose portrait but his would have been thus banished from the hall, where all the others hung in honoured remembrance? The haunting eyes of the picture made me shiver. I could hardly help gazing at it, fascinated, and felt as if in another moment the painted lips would begin to move, and the painted finger be raised to point out the buried treasure. Oh, it was very well to laugh and joke about the ghost in the cheerful rooms upstairs; but it was very different in this gloomy, darkened chamber, and with those spectral eyes glaring at me from the walls. A sensation as if cold water were running down the back of my neck suddenly warned me that I was getting overpoweringly nervous: there was nothing for it but to hurry over my preparations, and plunge into the safe harbour of my bed, where I could draw the clothes over eyes and ears, and try to sleep away the haunted hours till daylight. With a sudden resolution I sprang up, and in doing so struck the candlestick with my elbow; it fell with a crash to the ground, the light being of course extinguished in the fall, and myself left in total darkness!

That was a horrible moment; and yet there was something ludicrous in the adventure which gave me courage; and I instantly remembered that the fire in the hall had been burning cheerily a few minutes before, and, moreover, that a box of lucifer-matches and a pair of unlighted candles were always to be found on the mantelpiece there. To finish undressing in the dark, tête-à-tête with that dreadful picture, was not to be thought of; and, though not very sure of my bearings, I began to grope my way in the direction where I believed the door to be, stretching out my hand before me in hopes of finding the handle. Suddenly my foot caught, probably in a hole in the ragged carpet; I fell forward and was saved by the wall, or rather the door, for it yielded as I fell against it, and as I stumbled forward I heard it close with a sharp click behind me. I must be in the hall, of course; but why was it in such total darkness? Could that blazing fire have gone out entirely in so very short a time? And even if it had, was there no glimmer from the staircase window, which I knew had no shutters?— and why was there such a strange, close smell, as if there was hardly any fresh air in the place?

I stood for a moment bewildered; then I determined to grope my way along the wall, where I must come in time to the table, which stood only a few paces to the right of the door leading into Cousin Geoffrey's room, I groped on— on— on— till I was suddenly brought up by another wall, at right angles: turning the corner, I groped on there, and this time I was stopped by stumbling against what seemed to be a chest or box, about as high as my waist. I still felt my way on, and there seemed to be other chests, sacks, boxes. Oh! where was I? Was there any cupboard in the room, into which I had unwittingly strayed? No; I was sure that there was none. Again and again I felt high and low for a door-handle; but the wooden walls were hopelessly smooth; there was no trace of the door by which I had entered, though I felt sure that I must have groped more than once quite round my prison. It appeared to be a small room; long, but very narrow; raising my hand above my head, I could feel no roof. Bewildered, scared, I believe— for I really hardly know that I began to scream, the conviction rushing suddenly over me that my light words had been awfully fulfilled that I had found the hidden room, the existence of which nobody now believed in; perhaps, too, to judge by the presence of these chests and sacks against the walls, I had found the missing treasure. My voice re-echoed drearily. No help came; no sound, no stir was to be heard.

Never— never can I remember without a shudder, the feeling of utter desolation which struck cold on my heart at that moment— the sense of being cut off from all human help; alone, in the cruel, unfriendly darkness, I knew not where! I think I could almost have gone mad; but fortunately the very feeling that my senses were leaving me gave me strength to make one last strong effort to regain composure. First, I heartily commended myself to the protection of God; and then I was able to recollect that, after all, my situation was more ludicrous than terrible. I must be in some unknown recess in the thickness of the wall— probably the outer wall— and, of course, though it might be a work of time to discover the spring which I must have unwittingly pressed, it would be easy to effect my deliverance by removing a panel. The housemaid would come to call me at eight or nine o'clock, and all I had to do was to reserve my voice, instead of screaming it away, so that I might make her hear and understand when she should enter the room. With this resolve, I sank down on the ground where I was somewhere in the middle of the little narrow cell— and stretching out my hand, I felt along one of the chests, if chests they were, to ascertain if it was to be trusted as a support for my back. Oh, heaven! what, what met my hand?— what was hanging down the side of the chest? My cold fingers closed on other fingers; stiff, unyielding fingers; fleshless, bony. Something— I dared not think what— something which had probably been stretched along on the flat top of the chest— yielding to my frightened clutch,

fell down close to me— almost over me, with a horrible rattle, which echoed drearily.

Terror, sickening terror, overwhelmed me, and for the first time in my life I must have become entirely insensible; for I remember recovering by slow degree, the consciousness of where I was. When it all came back to me, my first impulse was to crouch up and draw my dress close round me, lest it should touch that horrible, nameless thing. And then a fresh dread came over me. How long had my swoon lasted? Was it not very likely that the housemaid had come and gone while I was insensible and incapable of making her hear? If so, might not days, nay, weeks elapse before anyone entered the fatal room? There was something too fearful in the idea that they might be searching for me everywhere, wondering at my disappearance, while I should be starving, dying, suffering all the agonies of a lingering torture, close to them. I thought of the poor bride in the old ballad of the "Mistletoe Bough;" and the tears which I could not shed over my own situation began to flow freely at the recollection of a horror which was long over and past, if indeed it ever existed in real life. On, on, on crept the lingering hours, and I could not at last help feeling sure that my worst fears must be realized. Day must surely be come, though there was no day for me in my narrow tomb. It seemed as if the ball had happened ages ago; as if I must have been many, many hours shut up here. The intense cold which I felt, the thirst which burned my throat, the sinking weakness in all my limbs, strengthened this conviction. Were these the first beginnings of the slow agony which was to end in death?

The horror of this thought swept away all self-control, and I broke out into a frantic cry—

"Will no one help me?— will no one hear me? Oh! I can't— I can't die here!— die like this!" and I shrieked violently.

Oh! joy of joys! I was answered. Yes, there was a voice— a loud, strong voice, though it sounded strangely muffled, and yet not very far off.

"What is it? What the deuce has happened? What is the matter?"

"Oh! is it Hugh? I am here, Hugh— I— Katie— oh! do let me out."

"Katie? Where on earth are you? Your voice seems to come out of the wall."

"Yes I am, I am in the wall; I do believe it is the hiding-hole, and oh! I don't know what there is here— such horrors! Can't you take me out, Hugh? dear, dear Hugh."

"Of course; but how the deuce did you ever get in?"

"From that dreadful room— Cousin Geoffrey's room. I was sleeping there instead of Bee."

"Oh! then I had better go round to that room." And his voice receded, leaving me greatly bewildered as to his present whereabouts. Just as the dreadful sense of loneliness began to creep over me again, I heard the joyous sound of tramping feet and opening doors— and then his dear, cheery voice, always welcome— how welcome now! sounded from the opposite side and much more clearly, "Speak, Katie, I can't tell the least where you are."

"Oh! here, here! Oh! you won't leave me again, Hugh! I fell: I must have touched a spring. Where am I?"

"How uncommonly queer! My poor Katie! You are in the thickness of the outer wall, I fancy. Well I this is a funny state of things!"

In a minute he said, in a calm, serious voice, which went a long way towards quieting my nerves"Katie, I must leave you for a few minutes. I might fumble here forever before I touched the spring, as no doubt you happened to do. The best way will be to take out a panel, and for that I must get Adams and his tools. Luckily he has been sleeping here, because of all the ball carpentry. I shan't be away long, but probably he is not up, so it may take some minutes; ten perhaps."

"Not up? What can the time be?"

"Just half-past six by the watch."

"Not six in the morning? Oh! I thought I had been here for ages. I thought I must have missed the house-maid when she came to call me. Hugh— you're not gone, are you?"

"Not gone, but going."

"But don't, don't!" I cried; "if you are only away five minutes, I know it will seem an hour, and I can't bear it— I can't indeed;" and, ashamed as I was of my childishness, I could not prevent my voice from dying away in a burst of sobs and tears. Hugh's answer came back in fond, caressing tones, such as I had never heard from him before:

"My poor little darling Katie," he said, "you have had a cruel shock. We shall never forgive ourselves for what we have exposed you to. But you must be reasonable, dearest Katie, and trust me that I won't be one minute longer than I can help. I'm going now, my Katie— don't be afraid. You will be all right and safe in a very few minutes now."

I heard his footsteps die away; but before I had time to become thoroughly nervous again I heard other feet and other voices gathering in the room, and speaking to me in tones of pity and consternation, but of amusement too, which did me great good: for in my feelings of horror and dismay, I had lost sight of the absurd side to my adventure. Beatrice was there, and I heard the squire's good-tempered voice, and his wife's gentle tones; and then came back again the voice that I liked best of all, and soon I was aware that Adams was

busy at the panel, and at last— oh, blessed moment! I saw the light of their candles, and the familiar figures in all sorts of quaint deshabilles. I felt myself drawn out through the narrow aperture and upheld by Hugh's strong supporting arms, and overwhelmed by the sudden sense of relief and safety, I let my head fall helplessly upon his shoulder, and I remember no more.

In a few moments I was conscious again, and found myself laid on the bed, Mrs. Pagonel and Beatrice attending on me, while the squire and Hugh seemed to be intent on examining the contents of the mysterious cell which I had so strangely been the means of discovering. I heard exclamations of wonder and satisfaction, and then of dismay— and Mrs. Pagonel interposed, and said that I must at once be taken to some warmer and more cheerful room. The squire accordingly came forward to give me the support of his arm, but not before I had seen a look of sick horror on his broad, ruddy face, and heard him mutter to Hugh, "Horrible! Is it not well written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the Lord'?"

All that day I was thoroughly upset; suffering from headache to such a degree that I could do nothing but lie still and endure. Towards evening, however, I fell into a deep sleep, from which I awoke to find myself out of pain; and drawing aside the bed-curtains— I was in Mrs. Pagonel's room— I was well pleased to see Beatrice sitting by the fire, presiding over a most tempting-looking tea equipage.

"Oh! Katie, I am so sorry," were her first words.

"There is nothing to be sorry for, Bee: it is all over, and I am quite well now," I said, rising, and proceeding to twist up my hair and arrange my dress, and then seating myself in the armchair which she was drawing close to the fire for me; "but do tell me; have I really found the hiding-hole?"

"That you have," answered Beatrice, handing me a cup of tea, which I enjoyed as never tea was enjoyed before; "the hiding-hole, and the treasure as well! Such hoards, Katie! chests and sacks full of coins, and all the jewels and plate of which we have the lists among our family papers, but which have always been missing, you know. O Katie, how can we thank you? This will put an end to papa's anxieties, I do believe!"

"Thank heaven! Oh! that is worth all I went through. But, Bee, how came those treasure there, do you suppose? What can have become of the wretched man? I can't tell you what horrible fancies I had about him."

"Are you sure they were fancies?" said Beatrice, very low: then as I looked questioningly at her, she said with a shudder

"Yes, my poor dear Katie; he must have really met with the fate which you were afraid of— how it happened, of course, no one can say— and after all, we may be jumping to a wrong conclusion; but a skeleton they have found there:

surely it must be his— he must have starved to death in the midst of all the wealth he had hoarded,"

"Yes and sold his soul for! Poor wretched man!" I answered with a shiver: the whole subject was to me too painful for discussion, and when Bee added that one could hardly pity such a wicked man, I could not echo her words; the horror was only a vague, unreal seeming romance to her, seen though the mists of so many hundred years, but to me it was a frightful reality— a thing of today.

I was not well enough to take part in the tenants' supper; but I came down into the little "spirit chamber," and there the guests visited me, one or two at a time. My last visitor was Hugh, who, as soon as he was released from his arduous task of proposing and responding to toasts, and keeping order among his tenants, came to ask how I was.

"You look dreadfully white, Katie," he said, sitting down near me; "not at all the better for your night in Cousin Geoffrey's room! How lucky it was that I could not sleep after the ball, and thought at last I'd go out before light, and try to get a shot at a wild duck!"

"Oh! that was how it was?"

"Yes: from my hearing your voice so plainly outside the house, I fancy there must be a shaft somewhere leading to the outer air— but we'll turn the place regularly out tomorrow. Poor Cousin Geoffrey! he's done us a good turn after all, hasn't he? and those bones of his shall have Christian burial at last."

I could not ask about this part of the subject; Hugh saw it, and went on quickly:

"And do you know that you've discovered a perfect mine of wealth for us? My father says a great portion must go in charity before he can feel sure that it won't bring a curse with it: but even so, there'll be enough bullion to pay off this mortgage which has been worrying his life out."

"I am so glad!"

"Ah! and what am I? I wonder if you have the least idea how wretched I have been these last few days."

I felt that, weak and shaken as I was, I could not answer without beginning to cry, and in a moment Hugh went on:

"Tomorrow, Katie, will you let me show you all the quaint old plate and the jewels? Such jewels! Miss Barnett may hide her diminished head forever. But one of them I must show you now— I can't wait till tomorrow."

He took my hand, and held over the third finger a diamond hoop, heavy and old-fashioned in setting, but the stones of great size and brilliancy.

"Katie, dearest, we have been looking out these jewels in the lists which we have: shall I tell you the name by which this is described there? The troth

plight, the betrothal ring: It has been handed down as such evidently from one generation of us Pagonels to another. Katie, don't you and I belong naturally to each other? Won't you promise me not to go to India? May I not put the ring upon your finger?"

And so it was that Hugh was enabled to carry out his wish of decking his wife in jewels surpassing the Barnett diamonds, and this was what came of my terrible New Year's Eve in Cousin Geoffrey's Chamber.

—The main incident of this story is one which really took place.

———————————

3: Fire of Retribution

Laurence Donovan

1885-1948

Argosy All-Story Weekly, 20 Oct 1928

"SLOW TIMED fire bombs started the blaze— we run onto one of them that hadn't exploded! Whoever done it knew a cross-fire would trap th' men at the camp—"

Old Beth's gaunt face worked with a grim tightening around his lips.

"Reckon you boys could fly 'round the fire 'fore it hits th' camp. I ain't ever been up in a plane, but I've heard you could drop a man anywhere with one of them parachutes— I'll take a chance. We gotta put an intake valve on that engine, load th' men an' make a run for it down th' mountain."

Nick Mims, fire patrol pilot, demurred at first, not because he lacked the guts to go, but orders were orders.

According to the old logger, Beth, his camp high on Round Top mountain was cut off by the fire from all the trails leading down. And once the flames sweeping up the slopes had reached the camp, there was no escape.

"But, Nick, we gotta do it."

Five or six times during old Beth's recital, Jack Singer, mechanic and relief pilot, had reiterated this. In the back of young Singer's mind was the thought of his wife, Nellie. She was camping with friends in the Priest Lake vicinity. Last year there had been a bad fire there, too. Supposing Nellie were trapped? Jack kept thinking of that.

"We gotta do it," he affirmed, impatiently.

"Yeh," agreed Nick at last, reluctantly. "An' if we crash, it's curtains for our jobs— if we get out."

"Them boys must be facin' hell up there right now," said Beth. "They can see the blaze for miles. The dinky-engine will come hell-beltin' down th' grade through th' cutover stuff— she might make it if we could only get her started. But th' dinky's settin' on a mile of level track— gotta have that intake fixed 'fore they could fire 'er."

"Who'd you think set the fires?" asked Nick, his gray eyes glinting.

"You sort o' put a crimp in Hinton's monopoly by gettin' the rail right o' way 'cross his cutover land an' runnin' logs to the lake, didn't you?"

"Hinton wouldn't murder my boys," said Beth. "He's my enemy, not theirs."

"Let's go," said the older pilot. "It's a chance. We'll fly around an' volplane down over the mountain top. There ain't ozone enough in the draft over that fire to keep the motor turnin'."

Old man Beth was making his first flight. He had had the parachute strapped on, asking for detailed instructions about its use. He feared the

height; and the idea of jumping into two or three thousand feet of space was appalling. But a score of his boys were in the fire-rimmed camp. Old man Beth would give them their one slim chance of escape or he would die with them.

Jack saw there was no shaking his intention.

"Dinky engineer there," he asked, "to put in the valve and get 'er out?"

"I'll get 'er patched up," evaded the old man. "I been 'round dinky engines a lot"

Jack knew then it was as he suspected. The dinky engineer was not in the camp. Probably not a man there was mechanic enough to install and adjust an intake valve properly, let alone drive the dinky down that perilous ten-mile grade to the terminal at the mouth of the St. Joe on the lake. If old Beth were sure the jump meant death, he'd jump out of the plane regardless.

"You'll likely land in a tree-top," Nick told Beth. "Don't try to slip through if you do. The 'chute will hang you up. Grab on, cut your straps an' climb down if you can. Cut your cord as soon as you jump. I'll zoom the ship so you'll be safe enough."

Nick sent the plane along the Cœur D'Alene lake shore until they were directly opposite the mouth of the St. Joe River and the circling fire on Round Top mountain above it. He banked the Stearman, pulled the control stick hard back and climbed.

Beth groaned when the plane had topped the drifting gray smoke. The flames had been rushing up the mountain at greater speed than he had figured. Less than two miles, as nearly as he could judge, separated the logging camp site from the fire.

Jack watched Beth, and he knew when the old man turned sick. The draft of hot air from the flames, roaring over the mountain top made the going bumpy. The big Stearman rocked, dropped, caught the air cushion and bounced along through the air holes. Jack's own stomach was not sitting so pretty and he was aware that Beth was having a bad time of it.

This form of air sickness is closely akin to seasickness and it requires all of a man's nerve to keep a stiff upper lip. But Beth's mouth was a straight line. He was looking down through the floor windows and he touched Jack's shoulder.

Jack had a glimpse of white through the trees a mile or so down the mountainside. The camp then was still untouched, but at any moment a drifting brand borne on the wind might jump the fire along for the extra mile or two.

At a point about fifteen hundred feet above the mountainside, where he dared swing no closer to the dangerous updraft from the fire, Nick idled the engine for an instant and called out:

"Close as we can come— get set an' jump when I swung!"

Although his face was tinged with a grayish pallor, old man Beth arose and stood ready while Jack unlatched the door. Jack saw that Beth did not look down and he knew why. Sheer grit is required to step off into nothingness. The old man was looking only at the door. His right hand was on the 'chute's rip cord.

Nick gave the motor the gas and tilted the wings sharply.

"Now!" he shouted and waved his hand.

Beth took one firm step toward the door and vanished over the side. Jack turned instantly, touched Nick's shoulder, and before the older pilot could remonstrate, dropped out the open door after the old man.

Nick was not so surprised as Jack expected he might be. He had known all the time that Jack would take the jump. He had kept silent because he did not want Jack to know that he knew. Nick swung the plane back toward the mountain top.

It was his job to get back to the mouth of the St. Joe and have emergency facilities ready. They would be needed if the desperate attempt at rescue succeeded.

Jack was relieved when he saw that Beth's 'chute had opened. Two or three hundred feet below him the round top of the 'chute was swinging in the wind. Underneath he caught a glimpse of Beth's swaying body. He saw all of this in the split seconds it required him to fall head downward past Beth's 'chute. He wanted Beth to know he was with him, so he did not rip his cord until he was a hundred feet or so under the old man. When his umbrella spread, he waved his hand and shouted. He heard the old man's voice and knew he was all right.

The wind created by the miles of solid fire front below swept the 'chutes swiftly toward the mountain side. The worst moment of their descent was at hand. Jack had been hung in the spike-topped cedars on previous occasions. But he was the lucky one of the pair this time. The edge of his 'chute twisted off a branching limb, and although Jack landed with a jolt, he was on the ground unhurt. Old man Beth was less fortunate.

Beth's umbrella was spiked squarely in the top of a slender cedar. Jack, freeing himself from the straps, got under the tree. Beth was fumbling with the cords and Jack saw he was cutting them.

A hard object came hurtling through the air and narrowly missed Jack's head. Jack smiled grimly. It was the new intake air valve for the dinky.

"Get th' valve— don't wait for me— I'll make it down—"

Despite his own perilous situation, Beth's mind was fixed on getting the log train engine working. But Jack stayed below until he saw the old man had freed himself and was making his way slowly down the tree. Beth reached the lower

limbs of the cedar and was attempting to cling to the trunk when a branch snapped. He fell heavily at Jack's feet, and Jack grew sick as he saw how the old man's leg had twisted under him.

Heedless of Beth's protests, Jack got him to his shoulder and started down the mountain toward the camp. He was making slow progress when he heard a crashing in the bush. Four or five of the logging crew had seen the plane and the 'chutes. They contrived a rough sling for old man Beth, and one of the men hurried ahead with Jack to the camp.

Occasional brands and sparks were falling near by. Jack looked along the twisting log track, with its light, rusted rails, and his heart sank.

Men of the logging crew crowded around, a new hope succeeding the black despair with which they had watched the crawling blaze. Jack had the pipes apart and the intake valve in place when Beth was brought in. His fractured leg did not prevent the old man from thinking.

"Grab down the canvas an' souse it in the springs," he directed. "Get the wet canvas an' all th' gunny sacks we've got onto the cars— when we get goin', every man wrap himself up— it'll likely be hotter'n blue hell, but the wet rags'll help.

"The track doesn't hit the heavy timber— goes across the cutover land, so it ain't likely there'll be any trees blockin' 'er. The cutover'll be hot, but we couldn't go through th' tall stuff."

Plenty of willing hands piled wood into the firebox when the valve job was done. Whether they survived or perished, Jack was glad he had come. Inexpert hands, he was sure, could not have installed the intake valve.

Jack's only twinge of conscience concerned Nellie. But had she known, she would have had him do as he did. She was game, was Nellie.

Jack watched the needle creep up on the steam gauge. The suspense of waiting for power to move was worse than all the rest had been. Jack helped get the dripping tent canvas on the cars to help protect the men. Bearded, silent, overgrown boys they were. Some had the strained look around their eyes that told what the hours of watching the approach of the blazing death had meant.

At last the steam hissed from the safety cock. Beth advised that they haul three of the flat cars. He figured it would give the men more room to fight the blaze, if the wet canvas proved insufficient to safeguard them. With two men stoking the firebox, Jack tested the throttle. The dinky coughed and its four teetering wheels bit into the rails. They were beginning to move.

Some one shouted from the rear car. A brand had fired the woods directly behind them and the blaze was spreading. They were moving in the nick of time. Some of the men shouted again, and Beth called to Jack to stop. Jack

could not hear distinctly, but when he had shut off the steam, Beth told him to wait for a minute.

"Three or four campers from up on the mountain just got into the clearin'," Beth explained across the top of the tender. "They're gettin' 'em covered with canvas on our last car. There— they're all clear— let 'er go."

The dinky coughed and the wheels spun again. Jack got no reassurance as to the light engine's stability from the rocking movement over the poorly built track, even at its first slow speed. The track ran for a mile on a level grade around the mountainside. This had been the loading spur. The dinky dragged the flats at a speed of less than ten miles an hour. To Jack, accustomed to the rushing take-off of his planes, they seemed scarcely to move. The acrid tang of the wood smoke drifted into the open cab and stung Jack's nostrils and throat.

He should have provided himself with one of the wet sacks or a strip of canvas. But old man Beth had thought of that, too. A lumberjack came climbing over the wood on the tender, dragging a wet canvas. Jack wrapped one end around his shoulders and trailed the remainder for the stocky little Irishman who was poking wood into the firebox.

The dinky puffed nobly and its wheels slipped and screamed on the rails as it strove to gather speed, despite the dragging weight of the flat cars. The chuffing exhaust drowned all other sound. The tall cedars and Ponderosa pine trees began to move past more swiftly. It was like riding a smoke-filled tunnel.

Just before the dinky reached the downgrade curve, a vagary of the wind swept the smoke back. Jack had a view of thin rails that dipped suddenly over the brink and corkscrewed down the mountain. He figured he would hold the dinky to low speed until they actually entered the heated zone. But the brakes?

Good Lord! He had not thought of that.

The logging train was not equipped with air appliances. Hand brakes on the flats were used to ease the loads of logs down the mountain. Jack sent his fireman back over the tender to instruct the men about the brakes. And, if they got into fire so hot that the men could not expose themselves, well— Jack refused to think further along that line.

Jack had thought he had taken extreme risks in the planes. But up in the air you could see something. Now the smoke closed in again and he was compelled to draw a corner of the wet canvas across his mouth and nose.

They were on the very brink of the grade. Instead of the dinky pulling the flats, Jack could now feel the shoving weight of the cars. The dinky was leaping ahead and down. If he had only thought of those brakes sooner. But the wheels squealed and grated on the rails. The men of the logging crew knew

their stuff. For a mile they eased along, the smoke lifting and dropping, alternately shutting off Jack's wind and giving him a chance to breathe.

Jack's fireman crouched under the corner of the damp canvas. The dinky and the flats would run by gravity all the way to the transfer pier on the St. Joe River, if they held the rails.

The smoke lifted. For an instant Jack had a sense of relief. But the reason for the sudden swirling of the smoke wiped that out. A sheeted wall of flame leaped across the track ahead. The men on the cars had seen it, too. Jack felt the dinky lurch forward. The brakes on the flats had been released.

It seemed to Jack that the weight behind must hurl the rolling little engine from the rails. But the drive-wheel flanges were tapered for just that sort of thing. The wheels screeched, but they held.

The flames sent a stinging tongue through the cab window. Jack instinctively jerked the corner of the canvas over his face. The hot wind tore at him like a breath from a furnace. He smelled the hair singeing on the backs of his hands. The little Irishman crawled close to his legs under the canvas. The dinky and the flats had become a blind rocket rushing down the mountainside.

The dinky rocked and lurched. Jack prayed inside that there might be nothing across the rails. He groaned as he thought of what would happen if a burned tree had fallen to block their way. He hoped that if they failed that he might be utterly destroyed. That would be better for Nellie than having him brought home afterward.

Jack risked a look ahead. The corner of the wet canvas was steaming. In front on either side the blaze was leaping and licking at short growth trees. Beth had been right. Only the fact that this was cutover land, small stuff, might save them. In the heavier timber of the virgin forest they would not have had a chance.

Their rushing speed now was more like the swift dash of an airplane. But a plane could go up. The dinky and the flats could only become a twisted mass of wood and iron if they were ditched. A blast, hotter than all the others, scorched Jack's face. He got his head under the wet canvas again before he breathed, which was well. One draught of that blaze into his lungs and whether they held the track or plunged into the superheated ground would not have mattered to him.

It seemed like an hour or more they had been tearing along, hemmed in by the blaze. Probably it was no more than a minute, for the swathe of the fire was less than a mile in width. A quick cooler draught struck Jack's face. He pulled away the canvas. For the first time since leaving the upper level he could see the track ahead. Two snaky rails were running toward him and disappearing under the dinky.

Jack heard the wheels squeal again. The men were striving to set the brakes. Their speed did not seem to lessen perceptibly. He heard a loud snap on one of the flats. A brake chain had parted. One of the men came crawling over the top of the tender, clinging to the swaying sides.

"We can't hold 'er!" he shouted. "Don't try brakin' th' dinky— you'll pile 'er up."

Curves where the track disappeared shot up the mountain toward them, and miraculously disappeared under the engine and cars just when Jack was sure they would be catapulted into the wall on one side or over the precipice on the other.

"If she holds we kin check 'er on th' loadin' pier— gotta mile run there," said the lumberjack in Jack's ear.

A long straight stretch of track, steeply pitched, loomed ahead. They were out of the fire zone now. Bushes and small trees became a weaving wall of green on either side. The dinky plunged into a cut. Jack breathed easier.

"Cross th' highway just ahead," yelled the lumberjack. "State road 'round th' lake."

Jack had a flash of the road. It wound up alongside the track on one side before it crossed. On the other it disappeared abruptly behind the wall of the cut. Jack thought of his whistle, but the steam was down. The whistle made no sound.

The automobile roadster that shot from behind the wall of the cut almost cleared the rails ahead of the rushing dinky. Jack thought it had, until, in a brief backward glance, he saw the little car turning over and over down the steep bluff below the highway. That same flashing view revealed another car coming down the highway and then the dinky shot around a curve and the scene was shut off.

"God!" cried Jack, "I hope nobody's killed."

"Musta heard th' dinky," said the lumberjack. "Can't be helped now— only a mile to go— 'round that next bend— I'm goin' back— we'll try an' stop 'er."

The dinky and the flats, with brakes grinding, stopped on the long level stretch of the transfer tracks. Nick was among the first to reach the dinky. Jack felt strangely light and a confused blur of faces danced before him.

"Jack! Oh, Jack!"

He opened his eyes with warm, moist lips on his own. Nellie? It couldn't be Nellie down here. She was camping up at Priest Lake.

But it was. She had been with the party that had gone for the trip up Round Top mountain. She was one of the party that had been under the canvas on that last flat.

Jack struggled to his feet despite the protests of Nellie and Nick. He saw old man Beth lying on a stretcher ready to be placed in a car. Beth reached out his hand. He tried to speak, but no words came.

A man came hurrying across the transfer pier from the office. He came straight to Beth.

"Hinton's killed," he said. "Just got the phone message from the fire warden. He'd been chasing him. His roadster went off the highway, turned over. Had a case of fire bombs in the back. Some of them exploded— burned up the car— Hinton was caught underneath."

"The mills of the gods," said old man Beth in a hushed voice, his fingers tightening on Jack's hand.

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4: The Garden of Delight

Cosmo Hamilton

Henry Charles Hamilton Gibbs, 1870-1942
Liberty, 20 July 1929

Prolific and popular British novelist and playwright, with many successes in West End theatres, and on Broadway; twenty or so movies were made from his stories.

THERE WAS to be a Gala that night in the open air restaurant of the Grand Duke Boris.

Sun had come to Nice again after a wet December and a January spoiled by snow. The Carnival had been a catastrophe. In the memory of the oldest inhabitant no season had been so bad. It was time, therefore, that the Garden shook off depression, put on a show of gayety, and made a bold effort to capture some of the entertainment money of the visitors who were coming at last.

The little box in which the Grand Duke kept his earnings was at its lowest ebb.

There was a screen of canvas drawn across the gate and it was locked. That meant nothing to Ivan Storogev, the successful gigolo, who, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, had crawled from his comfortable bed. A year ago he had been a waiter in that place, a loyal member of the commonwealth of the Russian aristocrats who made a precarious livelihood under the gentle and satirical leadership of the dead Czar's cousin.

In a sense a deserter, because he had capitalized his beautiful face and slim figure by attaching himself as a professional dancing man to the Negresco Hotel, Count Storogev was still welcomed in a friendly spirit by his former chief and given the rup of the untidy villa in which the brotherhood lived, cooked, and laughed away their tragic memories.

He made his way through the house, saw Princess Irina Petrovna hanging paper lanterns on the shabby pergola, and marched quickly to her side. He had the look of a man whose nerves were about to crack.

"You! " she said lightly. "How nice of you to come. None of us hang these bedraggled lanterns with such a touch."

In a vivid sweater and a short brown frock, hatless, with a glint of sun in her extraordinarily fair hair, she looked even more lovely than when, among the orchestra, she faced her father's fluctuating clientele every night in her Cossack uniform. There were men all over the world to whom the mere mention of Nice stirred the haunting memory of her enchanting face and that clear sweet voice.

Treating him as thotcgh he were a yapping Pekingese, she mounted a chair and hung the lantern herself.

He made no attempt to hang the lantern which she gave him. In his dissipated eyes there was deep resentment, and on his white face two red spots of rage.

He said thickly, "Why don't you answer your letters? You've had two from me this week."

Irina continued to put the candles in their sockets with a steady hand. All about her there was the air of one whose whole concern, like that of her companions, was to beautify the garden in order to refresh her father's box. Neither the time nor the mood was hers for emotion or personal things.

"If you're not going to help us," she said, "you're badly in the way."

He followed his own line of thought with the obstinacy of weakness.

"I don't intend to be ignored," he said, jerking back his hair. "You can't put me off as though I were a man who had come to mend something, a Niceoise with a bag. I'm here to know what you mean by treating me like this."

Irina was disturbed only because this man was interfering with her work. Treating him as though, he were a yapping Pekingese, she mounted a rickety kitchen chair and hung the lantern herself. All the same, there was something in Ivan's expression which made her take the precaution of calling to her father who was festooning the trelliswork near by with branches Of newly cut leaves.

Always amiable, the Grand Duke Boris turned, smiled at his daughter, who was the apple of his eye, and left what he called his exterior decoration to join her at once. He wore a blue beret on a head that was noticeably small. It was cocked over his left ear and looked all the bluer because of the whiteness of his hair.

His eyes were large and wide apart, gray and rather deep-set; his nose large and well cut, and his mouth very sensitive under a mustache that was curled away from his lip— a dyed mustache, palpably dyed, so that it looked unreal and as though stuck on with gum. There was a cleft in his chin.

He was wearing a thick white sweater and a pair of trousers far too tight. Here and there they were stained with the juice of stewed plums. There was an apron of very much worn green baize tied round his waist and a pair of chamois leather gloves on his long thin hands. He was proud of his hands which, in the old days, had turned over the leaves of his rare books for so many hours at a time.

All about him still there was the look of a delicate and whimsical student who did not confine himself altogether to his library, but spent many of his nights with women and champagne. No one would have guessed that he had commanded a Russian army during the first year of the war, or that he had had

the physical stamina and mental courage to endure the frightful hardships of winters at the front. On his face there were, of course, the lines of indescribable suffering and of those nightmares which, even now, and in that peaceful place, disturbed his sleep and caused him to leap from his bed in the dark and suppress a scream by clapping a hand on his mouth.

"Very nice," he said. "Charming. This is the sixth year during which these lanterns have turned our Garden of Delight into a Bower of Romance. They wear well."

He laughed at his exaggerated description of the effects of the tenth-rate things which had been purchased originally for almost nothing in one of those numerous little shops in the picturesque Italian quarter behind the flower marlcet which devoted themselves annually to the Carnival. He gave Ivan his left hand— his cousin Ivan who, if the world had not turned a somersault, would at that moment have been wearing the gorgeous uniform of an officer in the bodyguard of the Czar. Ivan Storogev, gigolo, deserter.

THE PRESENCE of the Grand Duke Boris even in that place and in those circumstances had the usual effect. Ivan clicked his heels and bowed over that friendly hand.

"I'm afraid that you, like ourselves, have not done well so far."

"Quite right, sir. Far from well."

"There has been a scarcity this year of those elderly dancing women on whom you rely. Never mind. The sun is here again. Optimism has returned. Meantime, it is kind of you, my dear Ivan, to come round to lend a hand."

Ivan was honest for once. He said, "I've not come round for that. I can't and won't stand the way in which I'm being treated by Irina— that's what's brought me here. You know as well as she does that I regard myself as engaged to be married. Except in such rotten times I earn enough money on which we can keep a respectable apartment, and I've saved enough as it is to lift her out of this place.

"A year ago, even while I was a waiter, you gave your consent to our marriage. I want to know— in fact. I'm damn well going to know—why Irina holds off and plays the fool with me; among other things ignoring my letters, slipping into shop doors when she sees me coming, and generally treating me to a systematic flippancy which is not deserved. That's all— and I'm glad you're here to be told."

Although the Grand Duke was astonished at this outburst from a man whose manners were usually beyond reproach, he retained his expression of bland aloofness from human emotion, and shrugged.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I am the keeper of this Garden. My little box is at its lowest ebb. We have a Gala tonight. Marriage, life, death, and the great hereafter have no importance compared with the vital necessity of making francs. There is the rent to be paid. Even a commonwealth must eat. Forgive me if I go back to my leaves."

HE blew a kiss to his daughter, who looked so charming on that chair. She was, he considered, quite capable of managing this high-strung person without his help. It was already 4 o'clock, time was flying, and there was much to be done. One whole wall of trellis remained to be beautified. He smiled at Ivan and moved away with grace. To make a success of that evening was as important to him then as a strong attack upon the enemy had been in those never to be forgotten days already far in the past— incredibly far, as it seemed.

From force of habit Ivan clicked his heels again.

Irina assumed an anger that she did not feel. This petulant man was no longer a person to be taken seriously. He had taken the easiest way. He had sold his pride for the fees of elderly fools. He had proved himself disloyal. When, a year ago, she had watched him carrying plates from table to table with a napkin over his arm, and he, like the other members of the commonwealth, was an eager and honest worker in the cafe which her father, in a satirical mood, had called the Garden of Delight, there had been a flutter in her heart. It was no longer there.

She said, "You have the naive, dramatic qualities of a newspaper, my friend. You talk in headlines. You bore me. You know the way to the gate."

Ivan stamped his foot. The gesture was almost effeminate. But the two red spots of rage on his face were redder now.

"My God," he cried out, "has the degradation of this cursed place dulled your moral sense? Why not be honest at least? Why not say that you're in love with someone else?... I may be blear-eyed after my enforced late hours, blind from the smoke of cigarettes, but I've been watching you whenever I could slip away from the Plage to which I'm doomed. You think— and I've seen it in your eyes— that I've lost caste by dancing with old fat women. I have. But so have you.

"I've seen you looking at Shakovskaya, that damned peasant, with his 'magic' violin, as once you looked at me. If it's true that you and he have the faintest glimmer of an idea of going up to our church on the hill, I tell you this in cold blood, here and now, there'll be murder in this Garden of Delight and suicide as well. As God's my judge, that's true."

He stood near to her chair for a moment, shaking with an ague of emotion. His face was turned up and Irina could see in his eyes what, knowing him so well, was an astonishing flare of love. She had never believed, even before he had proved himself to be so complete an egotist, that he was capable of loving anyone but himself. She said nothing. She used her father's eloquent and frequent gesture— a slight shrug to the accompaniment of raised eyebrows, which was so essentially Russian.

He turned on his heel and marched away— a slight, tall, almost too beautifully waisted figure, with black hair, glossy, a little too long. With his presence removed, the restaurant in its oblong garden among the trees, with numerous iron chairs which needed paint so badly, and uneven gravel with a sort of mosaic of weeds, resumed its cheerfulness.

Not only was the Grand Duke whistling Raquel Meller's latest song as he stuck his leaves into the once green trellis, but General Igorivitch, the head cook, and Prince Vladimir Dionisievitch, the xylophonist of the orchestra, were singing to themselves as they arranged the tables and treated the cheap napkins in their expert way. The other members of the commonwealth— a dozen or so ex-offlcers of the Russian army and navy whose names gleamed in the pages of their country's history, and the girls who were their sisters and cousins, some of them quite young— were busy and happy, too.

That "damned peasant," Paul Shakovskaya, the violinist, was tying pieces of colored paper to the pergola.

Both in his Cossack uniform and now in an ill-cut suit of tweeds, the trousers far too tight, the man of whom Ivan had become so passionately jealous caught every female eye. He was huge and simple, with broad shoulders and a magnificent torso; six foot one and a half.

His was the square face with the high Tartar cheekbones and wide blue eyes which one associates with the men who sing the *Volga Boat Song* as they haul up their battered fishing smacks from the sea. His fair skin was brown even although the sun had been so shy for weeks. There was nothing about him to suggest the artist, although he certainly was that. There was no man in any of the numerous orchestras which lend an added charm to the irresistible beauty of the Cote d'Azur who was so fine a player of the violin. His amazing technique and his almost religious interpretation of the music of the great masters were, oddly enough, unhandicapped by the possession of what is called, usually, as an excuse for unpleasantness and irresponsibility, the artistic temperament.

HE played because he couldn't help himself, as a bird sings, and there was hardly a moment of his day when his beloved fiddle was not tucked under his

chin. His genius would not have been so great without the infinite capacity for taking pains. With and without his instrument, however, he was a simple soul, utterly devoid of inhibitions; cheerful, good-natured, helpful, always ready with a big laugh whether it was necessary to go underfed or not; as loyal as a dog to the Grand Duke; as much in love with Irina as a sculptor is in love with his coldest masterpiece.

Peasant, yes. Why not ? He came of a line of peasants, and the occasional touches of melancholy in which he allowed himself to indulge only when playing the traditional folk songs of his country were inherited by him.

The murder and suicide that Ivan had threatened in his hysterical outburst might, if he had seen the look in Irina's eyes as Shakovskaya lumbered past her chair, have turned the Garden of Delight into the Garden of Despair.

The fact was, although no one knew it but herself, that Princess Irina Petrovna was ready at any moment to lose the caste to which her people clung, the possession of which enabled them to carry out their honest, servile work with undiminished pride, and go up with this peasant to the Russian church on the hill.

She loved this man with all the strength of her heart, hung enthralled upon his music every night, and admired the simple nobility of his character beyond the power of words. But she knew that unless she were herself to smash all the conventions and propose to him, the little church on the hill would never see them there. To Shakovskaya she was the daughter of the Grand Duke Boris, as far removed from his touch as though she were a star.

And when he came up to help her, having finished the job to which he had been allotted, she hid her feelings behind a friendly smile and spoke with the camaraderie which was the keynote of that place.

"Once more," she said, "the same colored papers that were used when we came here first."

He laughed. "*Economie*, Princess— the word we have learned in France. Without it where would she be? Well, I hope we have a success. His Highness is a little worried about the lowness of his box. We are to be gay. Look. These are the numbers I have chosen for tonight." He gave her an old menu on the back of which he had set out his program in full. Tschaikowsky, Stravinski, Rimski-Korsakov, and the inevitable Puccini— a master in spite of the modem critic who pretends to be scornful of melody. "You are to sing, if you will, Gounod's *Ave Maria*. But that is far from sad. That is an inspiration. We will have it with the fish."

IT was she who laughed this time. "And with the veal, the inevitable veal, the Coq d'Or," she said. "And with coffee— what?"

"*Boheme*," he said without a moment's hesitation; "brandy goes well with that. After which a descent for the sake of the dancers to *Ah Can't Give Yer Anythin' but Love, Babee*. My God! " The Grand Duke had never been able to afford a second band— one of those jazz bands such as were to be found at the Negresco, the Savoy, the Peroquet, and the Ruhl. Without any grumbling, Shakovskaya and his companions swung every night into what seemed to them to be trivial dance music at the end of their classical program, just as in the same loyal way they turned, their hands to any job in the day time which would help the fortunes of the restaurant.

It was nothing unusual to see the xylophonist mending broken chairs in the shed, or the four men, who played what appeared to be gargantuan mandolins, painting the legs of the iron tables with a thin coating of green. As for General Igorivitch, that dashing old cavalry officer, he was always to be seen, with his cook's cap tilted on the side of his head, pottering about the garden, picking the dead leaves, and tempting the straggling geraniums into bloom. A man of seventy-one, as thin as a greyhound, as bald as a billiard ball, with a large mustache which would have been the envy of a walrus, no one would have imagined that in the days of the Little Father he had been one of the ornaments of the court, a notorious ladykiller whose all-night parties in a magnificent and exotic house were famous throughout Russia.

Alone among the members of that commonwealth he, although his eyes were dim, had noticed with anxious sympathy Irina's dismissal of the man who was a member of her own family, and her growing love for the violinist who, under the old regime, would have been beneath her. He watched them now from beneath his bushy eyebrows as he went about with a rake, and as he did so he said to himself, "How will it end— if ever it begins? Poor children! It is true that we have escaped from death or Siberia, and are thankful to be alive in this beautiful spot even although life is only possible as the servants of the bourgeoisie and as objects of curiosity to those English and American tourists who come here for a thrill. They find it amusing, those people, to be served and waited upon by the aristocracy of a fallen country, and for that reason they give us larger tips. But because in this strange upheaval we find ourselves at the bottom, our traditions remain, and I cannot conceive the vaguest possibility of marriage between the daughter of the Grand Duke Boris and a son of Shakovskaya who herded swine. It is too soon, I fear, for the utter forgetfulness of those old conventions and shibboleths which are in our blood, though for my part, if I were Irina's father..."

HE halted in the middle of that thought like a horse refusing a jump. Human and sympathetic as he was, he revolted against anything so

revolutionary as the marriage of a princess of a royal house with a man, however noble his character, who in the old days had been something of a slave. He asked himself, all the same, if the beauty and youth of that girl were to be wasted, to flower and go off in that garden as his geraniums did.

The only alternatives were that she should marry without love one of their younger bandsmen or waiters who were of good families, or the elderly Frenchman with mackerel eyes and several chins, who was only too ready to place at her feet the pearls and diamonds which gleamed in the polished cases of his shop in the Avenue de la Victoire. Ugh!

"Well, well. 'Life is scarce the twinkle of a star in God's eternal day'— and I must slice the onions for my soup." And with a Petit Caporal hanging from his lip General Igorivitch stumped back to his familiar kitchen with somewhat creaking knees.

The word Gala, familiar as it is almost everywhere in France, never fails to exercise an irresistible pull. Somehow or other it suggests super gayety, a blaze of lights, myriads of small woolen balls which can be flung without fear of arrest at attractive or dignified neighbors, and many-colored balloons which may be killed eventually with the tip of a cigarette. There may be dolls as well— fantastic things with dead eyes, chalk-white faces, a long red slit for a mouth, and boneless legs— limp and horrid things.

The hand-painted placards and bills which had been stuck all over the place by the Grand Duke's younger followers actually did bring to the Garden that evening a goodish crowd. The tradespeople of Nice, who had grown accustomed long ago to the high-sounding titles of their Russian friends, came in the spirit of celebration at the return of the sun. It was good once more to be able to dine with comfort in the open air, even although it was still necessary to take the precaution of bringing coats.

The remainder of the guests were made up recognizably of the tourist sheep who were doing the Riviera at the cheapest possible rates, and herded quickly from place to place by the nerve-racked shepherds of the firms of Cook and Lunn.

The Garden of Delight lived almost up to its name. The day had failed early and the lanterns attached to the pergola and dotted among the trees gave the place, to kind eyes, an air of fairydom. Then, too, the huge electric light under its tin reflector threw from its high pole a large and circular pool, making the colored streamers into a sort of waterfall.

MOST of the tables were taken when the Grand Duke Boris left the shabby villa to move blandly and agreeably from side to side, as much to convey the romantic note as to encourage his people. As he passed the rather violently

painted shed in which the orchestra was perched, he halted for a moment, a gracious and charming figure in a white tie and an almost white waistcoat and the long tails of what is known to novelists, some novelists, as "full evening dress."

The orchestra, under the brilliant leadership of Shakovskaya, had just finished playing the preliminary and inevitable march— the appetizer which goes in France before every public dinner. In their Cossack uniforms, with polished boots and furry caps, the little band looked very picturesque— Irina with her fair hair arranged cunningly about her ears, especially so.

"Things are looking up, my children," said the Grand Duke gleefully; "all I hope is that we have enough food to go round. And I can see at least a dozen people here who, judging from former experience, will order decent wine— Beaujolais at least, Chateau Lafitte perhaps. Bravo! Our united efforts are winning a reward. We may gloat over that box tonight after the gate is closed."

"WITH the distribution of the soup" he started on his tour, murmuring pleasant things in perfect French both to strangers and to those whom he remembered to have seen before. To the diners who were obviously English he spoke with only the slightest foreign touch, and to the Americans who were briefly in that place on Mediterranean cruises he played the part of the Grand Duke with the sort of dignified humor which moved them very much.

Shakovskaya watched him with a smile in which there were affection, deference, and the deepest admiration. He said, turning to Irina, "A master of men. Princess. One whom it is a joy and an honor to serve." And because he was happy at the fullness of the Garden, exhilarated at the near presence on that platform of the girl who went with him through all his dreams, he took her hand and raised it to his lips. It was a gesture, made with simple spontaneity, in which he thanked her for her father and congratulated all the world that she herself had been born.

Excited, too, that that hitherto almost empty place was now filled with laughter and talk, Irina bent forward a little so that her curls touched one of the high cheekbones of the peasant's face. She was startled and even more excited at the effect it had on him. Reticence and deference moved away from his eyes like clouds which had covered the sun. Their places were taken by a blaze of love, passion, and desire which seemed to shake the stand. Her hand trembled under his touch and he and she seemed to stand for a moment in another world, another dimension, lovely in its clear light, vibrating with the high clear notes of birds.

"Oh, my God," he said beneath his breath, and withdrew his hand with a sense of shock, clicked his heels as a private to his commander, seized his violin, and stuck it beneath his chin.

Ave Maria— which was to go with the fish.

And when, hardly able to pull herself together, Irina took her place in front of the platform to sing, there was a tremor of so great a joy in her voice that it hushed the conversations at the tables and brought forth a burst of applause.

Lifted to another plane by what he had seen in her eyes, Shakovskaya said without looking round, "We will repeat, if you please."

With the veal, the Coq d'Or; with the chicken, Petrouchka; with the salad. Chant sans Paroles; with the coffee and brandy, Boheme—all according to plan.

And at the back of the Garden, near the gate in the shadow, Ivan Storogev, with a revolver in his pocket, and madness in his brain— all according to fate.

He had not been back to his rooms. Madame la Concierge at the brittle-looking building of flats in the Rue du Marechal-Joffre had remarked to her husband that the Count, whose profile she admired so much, had broken his routine. Not in her knowledge had he ever failed before to return at 6 o'clock for dinner and then to change into his extremely smart evening clothes in which to go to work, having debated as to whether he could wear a shirt which he had worn already twice. *Economie*.

He had left the Garden after his melodramatic threat, blazing with rage and suspicion, and walked all along the Promenade des Anglais to the spot where it withered into a fag end. There it was lined on the right with sordid little houses and on the left with the beach used only by the children from the village of Saint Augustin a little way up the hill.

Cursing life, Shakovskaya, Irina, the Grand Duke Boris, himself, and his folly in ever leaving the Garden, he made his way to the rooms of a man of his own nationality— a small suite attached to the restaurant and swimming place called La Californie. He had said to Irina, "If it's true that you and he have the faintest glimmer of an idea of going up to our church on the hill," knowing then that "if " was a word which had been left behind long ago like a signpost on the road. Before that hysterical interview with Irina he had made up his mind that she had come to a secret understanding with Shakovskaya and that that damned peasant who adored the ground on which she stood— everyone knew that— had taken the place to which he, Ivan, had the right. It was now his duty and even, indeed, his vocation, to avenge himself, his family, and the old traditions of Russia by wiping out this disgrace.

SO, in a sort of delirium of egotism, wounded vanity, and exultation, he knocked on the door of his friend's quarters, and receiving no answer went in. Petrcvitch was probably patching up the broken parts of a dilapidated shed. What did it matter? He possessed something which Ivan intended to take. He knew where it was and took it. It was the army revolver with which Petrovitch practiced at a target on the beach. Having seen that it was loaded, Ivan slipped it into his pocket, scribbled a note in which he said, "You will get this from the police," marched all the way back along the promenade, and threw himself into one of the cane chairs in front of the Savoy. There he drank brandy after brandy with the cold weapon lying against his hip, until the light went out of the sky and the long electric necklace outlined that beautiful coast.

Finally, like a man who was about to carry out a patriotic mission, he paid his bill, said good-by to the waiter, and made his way to the familiar restaurant. All his old friends were serving the soup when he dodged into the main entrance and took up his position with his back against the wall. He was in the shadows there, behind a tree at the very edge of the Garden, but not so far away from the last table as to be wholly exiled from the constant buzz of talk.

He heard the opening march, caught the sense of triumph which infected the Grand Duke Boris and his eager helpers, and was to be seen plainly, even from where he stood, on the faces of Irina and the man with the violin. God, how well he played!

Irina's heart was to be his target, not that of Shakovskaya whose life he considered meant nothing in the scheme of things. It was his intention to join the spirit of Irina as he and she passed over the thin line between two eternities, leaving their bodies lying upon the gravel of the Garden of Delight.

HE knew that it was Shakovskaya's habit to wind up his dinner program with a song. Every night in the old days, with his apron on his arm, he had waited in the middle of the Garden to see Irina come to the edge of the platform and had listened enraptured to her high sweet voice. He had made up his mind to hear her sing once more, and then, as the last echo of what was to be her swan song died among the trees, to send her out of the possibility of belonging to another man and follow after her. And as she came forward with a little smile of thanks at the ripple of applause, happier, it seemed to him, than he had ever seen her look, he drew the revolver from his pocket and put his finger on the trigger.

The orchestra went softly into the opening bars of *Le Bon Temps Viendra* which Shakovskaya had set to a haunting melody. And as the loyal peasant drew his bow across the strings of his muted violin, saying to himself, still

under the deep emotion at the confession of love that he had seen in Irina's eyes, "Can it be true, oh, God, that the good time will come?" he caught the gleam of Ivan's weapon and saw under the red glow of a lantern the white face and mad eyes of the man who also loved.

During the last few weeks the sullen enmity of the deserter had been obvious enough, though it had not been understood.

It was now blindingly clear to Shakovskaya that Irina had turned a cold shoulder on her cousin, not because he had gone into the dance market as a hired man, but because she had given her heart to himself. .

But as he stood there playing, outwardly calm but with a whirling brain, he saw with horror and amazement that the small circle of steel was not aimed at himself, but at Irina, who was standing, wholly unaware of impending death, two or three feet to his right. With a sort of divine inspiration it came to him that Ivan intended to hold his hand until her last note had risen into the hushed night like a white bird. Whereupon he flung himself quickly in front of her as a shield.

There was a loud report and he fell with a crash at her feet.

While the startled diners were crowding together in a desire for self-preservation, with screams, another report rang out. Ivan had put the barrel to his head.

Chaos, the crush of running people at the gate, the quick movement of the Grand Duke Boris and his faithful friends to the platform, the lonely crumpled figure of the gigolo lying on his face— and to Shakovskaya the knowledge of a hot sting in his left shoulder and Irina's lips upon his mouth in that Garden of Delight.

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5: The Rube and the Rubies

James Francis Dwyer

1874-1952

Blue Book April 1918

HE told it in the "Come-an'-get-it Restaurant," at the rear of the grand-stand at Sheepshead Bay. It was "Stampede Week," and New York had been invaded by an army of cowboys and cowgirls who had come to show the Easterners how to "bulldog" a steer, throw a rope and cling to a broncho whose whole effort was bent on hurling his rider in the direction of the nearest planet.

He stood six feet four, was wide of shoulder and so tanned by the Oklahoma sun that his teeth showed dazzlingly white when he smiled.

Said he, in answer to my question concerning the opportunities of New York: "The only two Westerners I ever knew who made good in the East are Will Rogers an' Heck Allen."

I knew of Will Rogers, the cowboy comedian; but I had never heard of Heck Allen.

"Where is he appearing?" I asked.

"Appearin'!" he cried. "Why, Heck's not appearin' anywhere! He's holdin' down a job that puts fifty plunks a week inter his jeans, an' he sort o' roped that job down out o' the pale blue."

I showed interest and a desire to catch the waiter's eye, and so, after a few minutes' interval, the man from Oklahoma told me this story:

THIS feller Heck Allen was a cow-punch on the Red Shingle Ranch, an' one day he saw an advertisement in a Noo York paper wantin' the whereabouts o' Hector Allen, who was in Kansas City in 1906.

"It's me!" says Heck, pokin' the piece o' paper in the faces of all the other punchers, "I was in Kansas City with a mob o' steers in December, 1906."

"Theres more Heck Allens than you," says Long Bilt Crowley. "I knew one down in Albykerky."

"Was he in Kansas City in 1906?" screamed Heck.

"Well, I couldn't say that he was," says Long Bill. "He wandered round some, but I couldn't swear that he was in Kansas City."

"That's the point!" yells Heck. "My name is Heck Allen, an' I was in Kansas City in 1906. It's money, that's what it is! Dad's brother went to Noo York an' made a lot o' money, an' I bet he's gone an' left it to me!"

"How d'yer know he made money?" says Long Bill.

"Well, he lived on a street called Grand Street," says Heck, "an' I guess only the swells live there."

Now, this Heck Allen had no more brains than a steer. We wanted him to write to the lawyers advertisin', their names being Kling, Kling an' Kling, but Heck wouldn't. He had six dollars an' seventeen cents when he saw that advertisement, an' the plumb fool started off for Noo York right away.

Heck's six plunks faded away before he was twenty miles from the Red Shingle; then he started to beat it. He was about my height an' a lot stronger; so when the brakemen an' conductors tried to put him off the train, they had to try awful hard. He stuck like a bur in a broncho's tail, an' most of 'em guessed that discussion was the better part o' valor an' said things to him at long range.

Heck roiled inter Noo York on a train that was bringin' a lot o' steers, an' he dropped off an' streaked for a place called Nassau .Street, where the three Klings had their law foundry. He was hoisted up seventeen floors; then he hopped through a door that was branded Kling, Kling and Kling an' whooped inter the ear of a clerk who was takin' a little nap.

"I'm Heck Allen!" yelled Heck. "I'm Heck Allen who was in Kansas City in 1906!"

The clerk looked at Heck like as if he was a noo kind of bug, an' Heck got mad.

"What's wrong?" he yells.

"Why," says the clerk, "you're not our Heck Allen!"

"Ain't I?" screamed Heck. "Why, you little button-headed, wall-eyed cayuse, I'll twist yer neck so as you can count the knobs on yer spine! I'm Heck Allen who was in Kansas' City in 1906, an' if you say I'm not I'll take yer dead carcass back to Oklahoma to poison prairie-dogs with!"

JEST then the fattest one of the three Klings ambled out o' his private office an' wanted to know who had gone an' let Heck off the chain.

"I want me leggersee!" says Heck.

"Yer what?" says the fat Kling.

"Me leggersee!" yells Heck, meggerphonin' with his hands like as if Kling was the other side o' the Rockies. "An' if any bunch o' crooks try to do me out of it, Pll make 'em look like a squirrel that's gone an' made faces at a cattymount!"

This guy Kling had never met a cowpunch in his life, an' he waltzed over to Heck Allen an' tried to push him out o' the office. Now Heck, on account o' beatin' it from Oklahoma to Noo York, knew all there was to know about the evictin' business. When Kling made a grab at Heck's shoulder, Heck took the hobbles off a punch that went out an' flopped Kling in his private chuckwagon an' knocked him plumb across the room.

The racket brought two more Klings out o' their holes, but they were as lucky as Soapy Smith o' the Lost Cow outfit. Soapy was waitin' for his girl in a dark lane, an' hearin' somethin' movin', he reached out his arms, thinkin' it was her. It wasn't. It was a bear, an' that bear gave Soapy a hug that made him mighty cautious about matters like that afterward. These two Klings jumped at Heck Allen, an' Heck whooped like an Injun an' did some jumpin' in their direction to encourage 'em.

They say it was some fight in that cffice. I've seen Heck Allen fight jest for fun, an' I can imagitie how he would rage around an' tear up things when he thought those lawyer guys were doin' him out o' his leggersee. He was a lace-edged cyclone, half a score o mules an' a bunch o' cattymounts rolled inter one section o' amberlatin manhood.

One o' the three Klings struck the floor, came back with a bounce an' remained standin' long enough ter yell "Police!" inter the telephone; so Heck Allen guessed he had better go away from that place.

Heck ran down the stairs, but the cops was comin' up; so he pushed open the door of an office on the next floor an' went. in. A feller was sittin' there in front of a lot of glass bottles like perfessors have, an' he nods friendlylike to Heck an' asks him to take a seat.

"I'm tryin' to do some dellikit experimentin'," he says; "but the guys jest over me have been dancin' a wardance, an' I couldn't work."

Heck grinned when he said that about the war-dance, an' he told him all about the fight, an' the feller laughed till he nearly fell off his chair.

"You'd better stay here till they get tired o' searchin'," he said. "If they caught yer, they might send yer up for five years."

HECK ALLEN waited in the feller's office, talkin' to him an' tellin' him yarns about Oklahoma. The feller said he might get Heck a job, an' when Heck said he wouldn't mind a job, the feller telephoned another chap, told him all about Heck, what he looked like an' how he would fight, an' the feller at the other end of the wire said that Heck was jest the feller he wanted. "He says bring yer along -this evenin',' said the guy with the bottles, whose name was Pritchard. "He'll meet us at the corner of Thirty-ninth Street 'an' Fifth Avenoo, an' I'll interdooce yer."

Well, Heck stayed in Pritchard's office till it was dark; then the two of "em started to walk up to the place where they were goin' to meet the feller who'd give Heck a job. It took 'em some bit o' time to get there, an' it was 'long 'bout eight o'clock when they got to Thirty-ninth Street. The avenoo was nice an' quiet, all the people from the stores havin' gone home. `

"He's not here yet," says Pritchard. "Lets walk up a block."

They started to walk up the avenoo, but they'd only gone a few yards when Pritchard stopped like as if he heard somethin'.

"What's that?" he said.

Heck pulled up to listen, an' he thought he heard a woman's moan come from behind a big packin'-case in the doorway of a store. He jumped for the case, an' as he did so, a feller hopped out from behind it an' streaked for a taxicab that looked as if it was waitin' for him. Heck was goin' to chase the guy, but as he turned, a beautiful woman staggered from behind the box an' dropped faintin' inter his arms.

"My jewels!" she screamed. "My jewels! Catch him! Catch him!" Heck never knew how a taxi guy goin' down the avenoo guessed that he wanted a machine, but he did. The taxi feller pulled up at the curb, an' Heck pushed the lady inter the machine's insides while he hopped up on the saddle with the driver. He forgot Pritchard. The lady was the most wonderful thing that he had ever seen. She had eyes as big-as mushrooms, lips redder'n all the poinsetyers yer ever saw bloomin', an' black hair that was so thick on her shoulders that Heck thought it was a shawl.

"Catch him!" she screamed. "He has robbed me of my treasure!"

"Don't worry, ma'am," says Heck. "We'll rope him if we have to chase him to Las Vegas."

Heck Allen was a chap that made everybody else's troubles his'n. He reminded me a lot of an old geek I read about once who went round the country huntin' fer maidens in distress. His name was Don Quick City an' he had a servant named Santy Pansy. If yer ever get hold of the book, jest read it.

Heck told the chap who was drivin' the machine to dig his spurs inter his old hearse, but the feller chatters back about speed laws an' traffic cops.

"Shucks!" yells Heck. "When a hoss thief is loose in the West, no one talks about speed laws. Which is the little button which makes it go fast?" he says.

The taxi guy points to it, an' Heck put his big foot on it; an' that machine started to gobble up the furlongs like a jack-rabbit that's gone an' run inter a convention o' bulldogs.

FOUR cops tried to stop Heck in the first half-mile o' that run, but they had as much chance o' doin' it as a June bug has of sidetrackin' an elephant. The taxi feller was cryin' 'cause he guessed he'd lose his license, which all the cops was writin' down in their notebooks as he whizzed by, but Heck was beginnin' to enjoy himself. Jest behind him a motor-cycle cop was eatin' the dust the taxi flung in his face, an' police whistles were playin' "There'll be a hot time in the old town" all up and down the avenoo.

The lady reached through the winder an' patted Heck on the arm an' looked-up at him with her big eyes, an' Heck trod harder on the. speed button. He took part of the stairs off an avenoo bus that was slow in movin' outer his way, an' the blamed old taxi carried a lump of that stairway half a block an' nearly brained a rheumaticky guy who changed from a turtle inter a mountain-goat when he saw Heck's airyplane comin'.

The thief's taxi was about a block ahead jest then, an' Heck was madder'n a hobtailed scorpion 'cause he didn't have his gun.

"Never mind," he yells out to the lady, "when I catch him, I'll break his neck or poison him or do somethin' else that's nice an' gentle to him."

The taxi feller tried to push Heck's foot off the button that was makin' the wheels go round; but Heck pinched him softly, an' the feller yelled like as if he was bit by a rattler.

"Full steam, skipper!" yells Heck. "Give her her head, or I'll fling yer out an' take the wheel myself."

The thief's bus swung inter the park, an' Heck's little ambylance takes the same trail, three motor-cycle cops, a police patrol an' five other autymobbils streakin' behind.

That park is all full of curly trails that don't go anywhere, an' the thief an' Heck an' the police"an' all the other autymobbils that was attracted by the chase go merry-go-roundin' tootin' so loud that they woke up all the hobos that was sleepin' on the benches an' all the little monkeys an' ourang-outangs that was housed there jest to show people there is uglier forms of life than themselves. The whole place was a pandemonium, with Heck's little wagon the core of all the fuss.

The thief's taxi took a circ'lar trail an' Heck gave a yell yer could hear at Council Bluffs.

"I've got yer, yer low-down varmint!" he shouted. "I've got yer cornered!"

BUT Heck hadn't. That thief hopped from the taxi an' took to the timber, an' Heck went after him. He dived plumb from the seat an' nearly broke his neck over one of those "Keep off the grass". signs. But he was game. Every yard or so he tripped over a piece o' wire that some fool had put up to keep people from walkin' under the trees, but he always picked hisself up in time to hear Mr. Thief scootin' away in front o' him.

"I'll get yer!" yells Heck. "I'll get yer if I run yer out to Oklahoma!"

Heck struck a little clear patch in the middle of which was a statoo of a feller holdin' his hat in his hand, an' jest as he reached that clearin', he lost track of the thief. There was a moon, an' Heck could see clear across that patch; but the jewel-swiper had disappeared.

Heck stood close to the statoo an' looked around. He was awful mad to think the feller had got away from him, an' he thought how tough it'd be to go back to Miss Big Eyes in the wagon an' tell her that the thief had given him a pair o' clean heels.

"The durned sucker!" he says. "I'd give my noo spurs an' rope to get a clutch on him!"

Jest as Heck says that, somethin' dropped on the cement at the foot of the statoo, an' he stoops an' picks it up. What d'yer think it was? Say, yer couldn't guess in a year. It was a ruby, a big red ruby, most as big as Heek's thumb, an' Heck stared at it with his eyes bulgin' out.

There was another little tinkle on the cement, an' Heck stooped an' picked up another; then he jest stopped plumb still an' stared at one o' the legs of the statoo. That leg started to stream rubies, scores an' scores o' 'em, big red stones that glittered in the moonlight an' made a little pile that was like blood where they fell on the cement.

"Oh, gosh!" gurgled Heck. "Oh, gosh!" he says; an' as he said it, he made a jump an' grabbed the legs o' the statoo an' dragged him down onto the grass! The thief guy who was maskyradin' as the statoo— him havin' found a block of marble doin' nothin' an' clawed hisself up on it— was some little bear-cat when he went to the mat with Heck Allen. Heck was used to bulldoggin' steers an' wrestlin' with guys who didn't care if they took the crease out o' their trousers while wrestlin', but he had one pesky parsnip in that ruby robber. The two of 'em rolled down the clearin' like a garden-roller an' rolled back ag'in so as to make sure that all the daisies had been murdered. He got Heck by the hair, an' Heck yelled, an' jest as the lady came through the timber along with the cops an' the bunch of hobos, Heck got a grip on him an' sat up on his chest.

"I've got him, ma'am," says Heck, "an' there's yer jewels on the ground," — pointin' to the pile of rubies near the statoo.

The lady gave a little joy whoop an' flung herself at the stones, while the cops had to form a ring an' use their hick'ry sticks on the heads o' the hobos who tried to give her a hand at pickin' up the rubies.

"Oh, my jewels!" she cried, scoopin' 'em inter a little bag. "Oh, my beautiful jewels!"

Well, Heck Allen an' the cops an' the crowd watched her doin' that. The thief couldn't watch 'cause Heck had his nose driven inter the ground an' was sittin' on his back, but the others wouldn't so much as blink, for fear they'd lose sight of the jewels. Some o that bunch o' fresh-air leaguers hadn't seen a five-spot since their dads flung one to the parson for christenin' em; so you can guess how they stared at the rubies.

WHEN the lady had gathered all the rubies up, the biggest cop got a clutch on Heck's prisoner an' lifted him to his feet.

"Lady," says the cop, "did this man try to rob yer?"

"Yes, yes," she says, "he was my sekkertary, an' he tried to steal my jewels,"

"D'yer give him in charge?" says the cop.

"What is that?" she says.

"D'yer give him in charge?" chirrups the cop. "D'yer want me to arrest him?"

"No, no!" cried the lady. "I don't want him arrested. I'm goin' to India to-morrow, an' I can't wait to prosecute: him."

One of the other cops opened a fat notebook an' says to Heck Allen, "What's her name?"

"Search me," says Heck. "I never saw her till this guy was gettin' away with her jew'lry."

"Ma'm, will yer tell me yer name an' address?" he says.

"I'm the Maharanee of Bahdpur," says she.

Those cops were ignorant guys. They looked at each other; then the silliest one o' the bunch says: "Yer say yer name is Mary Ryan an' yer came from. Badport. Where's Badport? In Jersey?"

"No, no," says the lady. "I'm the Maharanee of Bahdpur. I'm a princess. Me husband is a roger."

Well, the cops scratched their heads an' looked at the lady an' Heck Allen.

"Where are yer stayin'?" says one o' the cops, speakin' to the lady.

"I'm stayin' at the Plaza," says the lady. "I've five rooms there."

Well, that little statement made the cops sit up an' take notice. An' Heck Allen opens his mouth too. Here was Heck, jest in outer the big grass-patches o' Oklahoma, an' he gets all mixed up in a thing that looks like the mainspring of a dime novel.

THREE newspaper reporters got there jest about that time, an' when they started to fire questions at the lady, she turns to Heck an' asks him to see her to her hotel. "But before I go," she says, "I must reward the p'licemen. If they hadn't been here, some o' my jewels might have been stolen."

She put a little hand that was whiter'n a clean tablecloth inter the bag, an' she forages round till she found eight stones that she thought were a nice size for scarf-pins for cops. She gave 'em one each an' knocked 'em so plumb silly that they couldn't thank her. When she did that, she turned an' looked at Heck Allen, who was pushin' the newspaper men away: from her.

"You are a brave, brave man," she says. "Put yer hand inter this bag an' take what yer think is a fair reward."

Now no one had ever told Heck Allen to help hisself to rubies, but he was not a greedy guy. He jest' stuck his big paw inter the bag an' took one good-sized stone.

"Take another," says the lady.

He stuck his paw out on another foragin' expedition an' fished up one that was bigger'n the first.

"Do it ag'in," says her ladyship.

"Oh, shucks," says Heck, who guessed he had about ten thousand dollars worth o' jew'lry in his hand, "I got two now."

"Three is lucky," says the Maharanee.

Well, Heck dived ag'in an' cops a stone that was near as big as a duckegg. "Oh, gee!" he says. "I've gone an' Boones the Jess Willard of yer collection!"

"Nonsense," she says. "Where that ruby came from there is hundreds of others, an'," says she, speakin' sort o' dreamy-like, "I own the Bahdpur mines, where they come from."

When she said that, those newspaper guys an' the crowd in general unloosed an "Oh" that yer could hear over in Noo Jersey. The park hobos were lookin' hard at the bag, so Heck reminds her of her intention of gettin' back to her hotel. One o' the reporter idjuts unloosed a flash-light that half scared her to death, so Heck steered her back to the taxicab quick.

Well, the cops came along 'cause they thought she might give 'em another ruby, an' the crowd came 'cause they thought some one might knock the bag outer her hand. An' the newspaper guys hung to the percession like flies to a hairless pup, askin' a thousand questions o' Heck Allen an' the cops.

The Maharanee got afraid as the crowd got bigger, an' when she got to the hotel, she jest squeezed Heck Allen's hand, looked at him quick with her great big mushroom eyes an' ducked inter the elevator, the manager, the night-clerk an' six porters tryin' their durndest to keep the crowd from streamin' up the stairs. There were other newspaper guys there then, an' they were firin' questions at Heck Allen till Heck got plumb sick o' 'em.

"Yer can go straight to Jericho!" he says to one little rat who was that small that he didn't reach up to Heck's gun-belt. "If yer don't stop pullin' at me, I'llcut the top off yer empty head an' use it as an egg-cup!"

ONE o' the cops told Heck he oughter be careful o' hisself on account o'. havin' the three big rubies in his pocket, so Heck slipped out a side door an' started down the street. It was gettin' late, an' Heck remembers that he has no

money an' no place to sleep. So he jest thought he'd pawn one o° those big rubies so as to get a bed for hisself an' somethin' to eat.

All the pawnshops were closed, every durn one of 'em, an' Heck Allen tramped up an' down the streets tryin' to think out how he could get some coin. The only guy he knew in Noo York was Pritchard, the feller who brought him up Fifth Avenoo to get him a job, but he had lost Pritchard when he started after the Maharanee's sekkertary. An' Heck was a bit skeery *bout stoppin' strangers in the street an' tryin to sell 'em rubies that was bigger'n walnuts. He was like ol' Sam Whitty who found the White Prince Mine. Sam had no water, but he had a chunk of gold that weighed a hundred an' eight ounces; an' he would have given that big chunk for one bottle o' beer.

"Well," says Heck, "I've got a fortune an' it'll keep. The only thing I can do is to keep walkin' till the pawnshops open. If I go to sleep on a park bench, I won't have any rubies in the mornin."

So Heck Allen started to walk up one avenoo an' down another, an' every now an' then when there was no one about he would stop under a lamp an' take a peep at tlie three stones. "Wow," he would say, every time he brought 'em out to give 'em the once over, "I'll get inter some good clothes in the mornin', an' I'll go up to that big hotel where she's stayin', an' I'll put up there too."

You see, all the time Heck was hammerin' the avenoo he was thinkin' of the Maharanee, thinkin' of her big eyes an' her lips that was redder'n poinsetyers, an' her black hair. He couldn't think of anythin' else. She had said she was married to a roger, but Heck had a fool idee that if she saw him dekkyrated in good clothes she might hire him to run the ruby mines out in India. As I told yer, this Heck Allen didn't have no more brains than a steer, but he was a powerful big dreamer.

When it came daylight, Heck was way uptown; so he turns an' steams back to the middle o' the city. There was pawnshops up in the part o' the town he was in, but Heck guessed that none of 'em had enough money to give him what he wanted on one of those rubies. He wanted an awful lot, enough to buy eleven suits of clothes an' a lot o' shoes an' hats an' shirts an' collars an' things like that.

Heck came down Fifth Avenoo lookin' for pawnshops, but there was none there. He asked a cop when he got to Thirty-fourth Street, an' the cop told him to go over to Sixth Avenoo; so Heck swings cross town, his big hand holdin' the three rubies.

HECK was passin' the Waldorf Hotel when he saw a crowd in front of a shop that had jest opened, it bein' then about eight o'clock. People were millin'

round like a bunch o' steers tryin' to get a look in that winder, so Heck thought he would take a squint to see what was there. He was taller than most of the people, an' he could see right over their heads.

What d'yer think Heck Allen saw? Yer wouldn't guess in a year. Bet yer a dollar yer wouldn't! That winder was chock-full of brooches an' bangles an' stickpins, all with rubies in 'em, great big shinin' rubies. There was a little pile o' rubies about two feet high right up near the front, an' on the pile was a sign readin': "Bahdpur Rubies! The greatest imitation ruby in the world! Cannot be detected by experts. Any one of these magnificent stones for sixty-nine cents!"

That wasn't all, either. All the front o' that store was pasted with the first pages o' the mornin' papers, an' what those papers didn't say about the Maharanee of Bahdpur an' the rubies that she grew an' watered in her own back yard could be written on the back of a postage stamp. There was a lot about Heck too, an' a photygraph o' him as the feller with the flash-light took him.

Heck stares at the show for about five minutes; then he tramps inter the store. A man behind a counter gave one look at Heck an' ducks down quick, but a woman with big mushroom eyes an' two lips the color of pointsetyers hops out of a little cage labeled cashier an' grabs Heck by the two hands.

"Oh, I knew yer'd find me!" she cried. "I knew yer would! I wanted to see yer an' ask yer pardon. I couldn't, last night, 'cause that would have put the show away, an' it was goin' so splendid with all the little reporters askin' questions!"

"An' you're not a Maharanee?" says Heck.

"No, no, no!" cried the girl. "I'm jest a plain American girl. My brother, Mr. Pritchard— you met him yesterday,— invented these rubies, an' we planned to get some free advertisin'. Then you came along, an'— an'— an'— I'm sorry," she says, "but you was jest perfectly splendid. Jack, come out an' speak to Mr. Allen. You're not angry, are yer, Mr, Allen?"

"Angry?" says Heck. "Why I couldn't be angry with you if yer took me for a sheep man an' fed me on mutton for seven years. Angry? Why, I'm tickled to death at bein' able to help yer out. An' you certainly kidded those little newspaper guys a treat."

WELL, the girl's brother came out an' spoke to Heck, an' it ended up that Heck stayed an' went out to lunch with the two of 'em. John Pritchard offered him a job in the store, an' Heck took it. Yesterday I met him, an' he told me he was gettin' fifty plunks a week. He took me inter the store an' interdooced me to Miss Pritchard.

"What d'yer think of her, Bill?" he says to me when we came out.

"Think o" her?' I says. "Why, Heck, she is a Maharanee!"

"Of course she is, Bill," he says. "She is a Maharanee for sure, an' next week, Bill, I'm goin' to be her roger, her durned of cow-punchin' roger from the Red Shingle Ranch in ol' Oklahoma!"

6: River Gold

A. Fox Parry

Alice Fox Parry, c1903-1951
Australasian (Melbourne) 14 Dec 1935

JERRY STANFIELD straightened up painfully. Washing for gold is a back-aching job, especially when there is little reward for one's labours. It was nearly dusk in the Lynn Gorge, for the high tree-crowned walls plunged this part of the river into shadow more quickly than the wider reaches beyond. Already most of the workers who lived in the cluster of tents at the entrance of the gorge had given up for the day; but Stanfield, whom they credited with the eyes of a hawk, had carried on a little longer.

From where he stood, he could see the rushing Lynn as it hurried into the gloom of the great cleft in the hills, through which it found its way to the plains beyond. hi spring the steep slopes were splashed with golden wattle, but now December was come there was only the scent of the gums to mingle pleasantly with the cool sound of running water. It was a beautiful place, but he was too weary and discouraged to care to-night.

Then a shower of stones from the hillside above him made him swing round resentfully. Protests more forcible than polite were suddenly stifled, as he saw descending upon him with involuntary speed— a girl. Before he knew what was happening, he had sprung forward, and checked her progress almost at the water's edge.

"Thanks— ever— so— much!" The words were jerked from her, as the struggled to regain her breath. During the process he noted that she was Very young— surely not twenty— provocatively slender in well-cut riding breeches and orange pullover, and possessed of a clear pale face, and large dark eyes. . Also, she did not seem in the least upset or discomposed.

"You should never come down a hill like that," he said severely. It's dangerous— to those underneath."

She began to laugh. "I didn't mean to come all the way, but once I started there didn't seem to be any way of stopping. I had to get to you somehow."

"Me?"'

"Well, anyone," she retorted a trifle impatiently. "You see, I'm lost."

"Oh!"

"And exhausted. Do you mind if I sit down?" She collapsed upon a slab of rock with a sigh of relief, mid looked up at the tongue-tied young man, with a flicker of mischief in her brown eyes.

"My name is Molly Faulkner," she continued. "What is yours?"

"Er— Wilson." He cleared his throat. "Can I— that is—"

"Quite one of us, in spite of the attire," decided the girl; "and that blue shirt suits him." Aloud she said. "You can help me lots. I want some food, a rest, and directions (fool-proof) back to Lynton Vale, Mr. Carey Faulkner's place."

"But you're miles away."

She sighed. "Tell me something I don't know. I set out on a horse, but the horse dispensed with me the other side of that." She nodded towards the overshadowing mountain, from which she had come. "The bush is very confusing," she added, and in spite of her Jaunty manner her lips drooped pathetically.

It occurred to Stanfield that so far the honours of the encounter had not been his. Now he roused himself.

"The food shall be forthcoming as soon as I can boil a billy," he said. "The rest you're having now. As for the directions, I'm afraid the nearest place is five miles away, but from there you could telephone." He hesitated. "I think you'd better wait here, and I'll bring you something to eat. The boys aren't used to visitors."

She nodded. "Sorry to be a bother."

"I assure you it's a pleasure."

She watched the tall, broad-shouldered figure disappear round the bend in the gorge, and then with a thankful sigh removed her boots, and plunged her tired feet into the rushing water. At first its icy coldness almost took her breath away.

Stanfield was not long in getting the food he wanted, though his supplies seemed painfully inadequate— bread (well! at least it was yesterday's), butter, and a tin of peaches. The others had got a fire going, and he soon had his billy boiling. He was thankful that his first Impulse had been to keep her away from the camp. Old Joe Finnegan had taken advantage of the hot night to wash his only shirt, in preparation for the Christmas festivities. Smith and Carlton had evidently procured another bottle of whisky, and were already at the quarrelsome stage. His lips were set more firmly than ever, as he gathered the things together.

"Cooler up the river," he said curtly, and the men, who had always found him unsociable, took no further heed of his going.

The girl smiled at him gratefully over her milkless tea. "When I next get lost," she said, "It will be winter time.

"It has been hot up top, I suppose," he answered. "Down here, it's almost always cold."

"Tell me," she changed her topic with lightning quickness— "Do you get much gold?"

He shook his head, and there was a suggestion of weariness in his voice. "Not much now. At first we had some decent hauls. Now, most of the chaps have moved on."

"It must be fun."

"Think so?"

"You don't, evidently. Then why?"

"Needs must when the devil drives."

"I see." She looked up at the cool green slopes above, and for the first time felt a little awkward.

"There's bread and butter in it, If you work hard enough," he continued, "but not much jam."

"And I love jam."

"So do I— at least, I used to; but it's surprising what you can do without."

"Well, it runs to peaches, anyhow."

He laughed. "They were a Christmas extravagance."

She looked at him blankly. "Why— are you going to spend Christmas here?"

He. nodded. "The boys are going into Mooradine to celebrate, but I'll stay behind. I haven't much to celebrate," he added, with a touch of bitterness. He did not add that his avoidance of the township had been a topic of conversation in the little camp for some time, until his mates had reached the decision that he was "wanted," and had thereupon accorded him increased respect and sympathy.

"But what a way of spending Christmas," said Miss Faulkner. "We're having a crowd up from town, and—" It suddenly occurred to her that she was being very tactless, and she shook back her long dark hair.

"I suppose I'd better get my boots on, and be moving, or my father will be setting the dogs on my trail. He does worry so. Five miles, you said?"

He nodded, and began to collect the enamel cups and plates.

"That means ten for you. I am sorry."

"You needn't be." His rare smile was very attractive. "I walk a lot at night."

"I'll take a compass with me next time."

"Yes; getting lost is easy, when you're new to the bush."

"How did you know I was?"

He seemed a little confused. Then—

"Country gossip penetrates even here, you know."

"What sort of gossip?"

"Merely that someone named Faulkner had bought Lynton Vale."

"Yes, that's daddy." It was almost too dark to see him clearly, but his voice sounded unnecessarily curt, she thought, and she rose to her feet. "I'm ready to go now," she said quietly, and the scramble up the hill commenced.

It was a stiff climb, especially in the dark, but the young man seemed to know exactly when his helping hand was needed, but when at last level ground was reached they made swift, silent progress. At the gate of the farm, he stopped abruptly.

"They'll look after you all right in here," he said. "Good-bye."

"But can't I even say thank you?'"

"No need to, really." He did not see her proffered hand in the darkness. "So long!"

She heard rather than saw him go back the way they had come, and then with a tiny shrug she entered the gate he bad opened.

Four days later came Christmas Eve, and still the wave of heat remained unbroken. There were fires in the ranges, and the distant horizon was clouded in blue haze. Those four days had been strangely restless ones for Molly. A spoilt only child of a late marriage, she had lost her mother when she was very young, and since then it had been Carey Faulkner's aim in life to gratify her every wish.

That she had not been completely spoilt in the process was due to her inheritance of some of her father's level headedness, a quality that had built up a comfortable fortune, which even bad times had not seriously depleted. Because Molly loved the bush, he had bought Lynton Vale, and had established himself there permanently only a few months previously, when the incompetency of his manager had rendered the presence of the owner essential. Molly loved the place, and was soon quite at home there.

This morning, after a consultation with the housekeeper concerning final arrangements for her house party, the girl was free to carry out a plan which had been maturing in her mind ever since her adventure. A visit to the kitchen resulted in the packing of a hamper, containing a Christmas pudding, some cake, a cold roasted chicken, and various other delicacies. This was strapped to the saddle of a quiet horse, and Molly rode out of the homestead gates just after ten o'clock.

For reasons of her own, she had not been specific as to her destination, for her father had been upset by her recent misadventure, and commanded that in future she should not wander so far afield. Molly had not argued, but, as was her custom, reserved her own decision. Now, she turned deliberately in the direction of the Lynn Gorge, wrinkling her brows a little, as she saw the blue smoke thickening above the wooded hills. The sun grew hotter, and the

dust rose in little spirals from beneath the horse's hoofs. This time she approached the gorge by the beaten track among the timber, The shade was very attractive, but it was not as cool as usual, for the air was full of smoke, and very hot.

Had she been country-bred she would have realised her danger, but she rode on heedlessly until at last she emerged on to the little clearing with its rough tents.

The camp, appeared to be deserted, and she hesitated. Of course, she had really planned to leave the hamper, and return without seeing the young prospector. Her guests were due for lunch, and she knew her father would hot approve of her action at all, but she was hot and tired, and the gorge looked very cool and tempting, so she slipped from the saddle, unstrapped the hamper, and tied the horse to a tree.

"I'll give you a drink when you're cool," she told him, and then set off down the narrow foot track which led along the river. It was an Interesting path, full of unexpected obstacles, such as fallen tree trunks, and sudden holes. On one side the cliff rose, fringed with fern; on the other it fell away to the river. It was nearly ten minutes later that she came to the place where she had found Stanfield, and her heart began to beat a little faster. She felt that she would like to see him just once again. Unconsciously, she began to whistle a popular air as she looked about her, but there was no sign of anyone down by the river. Suddenly she raised her head. Away among the rocks she thought she heard faint call. There it came again. Someone was hurt and in pain, and she left the path with her usual impetuosity, slithered a few yards, and rounded a large boulder, which seemed to have fallen from the cliff above. In its shadow lay the man she sought, but there was pallor under the tan of his face, and his eyes, as they met hers, were pain-filled and tired.

"You?"

Molly nodded. "Yes— me. You've hurt yourself?"

"It's my ankle— I think it's broken— worse than a sprain, anyhow, because I cant bear to move it at all." His eyes closed. "I've been here since yesterday."

"Yesterday? But where are the others?"

"They cleared off to the township because of the fires."

"But—" Molly's brain cleared, "You must be starving."

"Just a bit hungry. Fortunately, I fell near the water."

Already she was stumbling back the way she had come.

"I'll be back soon," she called, and fairly ran along the breakneck path, until a severe fall made her more cautious. At the camp trouble awaited her. Molly had never been able to tie a knot in her life, and her horse, rendered uneasy by the proximity of the fire, had quietly returned home. At the moment she was

too concerned to worry about that, and, seizing the hamper, die made her way quickly back to the sufferer. He had managed to prop himself up against the rock, and called a warning as she began to descend.

His eyes glowed with approval as she began to unpack. "I say, you are a brick," he said enthusiastically.

She blushed a little. "I owed you meal, and anyhow, it's Christmas time," she returned.

"Bread upon the waters— you've no idea how long it is since yesterday lunchtime; besides—" His face darkened. The prospect of having to lie there unaided and starving had not been pleasant during the long, dark night.

"Is your foot hurting?" she asked anxiously.

"Aching a bit— that's all," he returned, "Look here, you're not having anything yourself."

"Oh, well, I'll be too late for lunch, so perhaps I'd better." She accepted the wing of a chicken in her fingers, with a laugh. "Dreadfully primitive— I should have got some things from your tent, but all I could think of was the hungry look in your eye."

"Bad as that, was it?" he was fast recovering his natural manner. "All the same, you've no business to be riding in these hills with the fires so close. It's lucky for me you did this time, but it's a dangerous habit."

"Well, it's walking I'll be as it happens," she replied philosophically. "My horse has left me."

"What, again?" His involuntary start sent a shoot of pain through his injured foot, and be closed his eyes far a moment "Then you must go at twice," he continued urgently. "If you were caught—"

"I'm going." She rose to her feet "Not because you're so rude as to want to get rid of me, but to bring you help." She paused. "I never could tie a knot in anything. Which is your tent?"

"The one nearest the river."

She smiled down at him.. "I guessed it was. The others were—" She looked slightly disdainful. "*Au 'voir*!"

He watched her go, a queer little smile on his face. Fate had played strange tricks on Stanfield during the past two years, but none so strange as this. He shut his eyes and began to doze, but he was soon roused, for she was back again, wide-eyed and afraid.

"The fire is down over the mountain— right across the track. However shall I get out?"

"I'm afraid it means postponing your walk for a bit." He tried to make his tone sound cheerful.

"But I must go."

"I don't see how you can. We're evidently cut off on the Mooradine side, and the way out at the other end of the gorge only leads to the forest, and it's more than twenty miles to the nearest township on that side. You couldn't possibly walk it, let alone the risk of being caught by the fire on that side, too."

"Will it come here?"

He shook his head. "Not in a hundred years. We're safe enough. It might get the camp, though. Perhaps you'd better go back for my stores, and—" He enumerated several other personal belongings.

"I'll go now." He liked the courage of her, and her silent acceptance of the situation. It took two trips before the transfer was completed, and the second time she reported that the fire had crept very close to the camp. Now that the need for action was past tears began to force their way to the surface.

"It's— not me," she murmured, as he endeavoured to console her. "It's daddy—what will he think? And to-morrow is Christmas Day."

"I know, and if I hadn't been such a clumsy fool—"

"It's not your fault. It's not. I'm glad I found you."

"That's something," he smiled. "I shan't have a lonely Christmas after all." !

She dried her eyes with decision. "There. Now I'm going to bathe your foot and make you comfortable. Then I'm going to learn to tie knots— real tight ones."

She carried out this part of her programme, and the day passed easily enough. If it had not been for the thought of her father she would have enjoyed the adventure. As Stanfield had predicted, they were safe enough from the fire, but it seemed as if the flames were all about them. Wrapped in a blanket Molly vowed she could never sleep, and yet, amazingly soon, she had drifted out of the sound of running water into a dreamland, peopled mainly by brownfaced, blue-eyed men, with broad shoulders and a slow pleasant way of talking. When she awoke it was day again, though in the shadow of the gorge it was more like twilight.

Hurriedly dipping her hands and face In the stream, and smoothing her hair, she sought the invalid, who mendaciously declared that he had passed a splendid night, but there were tired lines about his eyes which worried her, and made her long for help, though there was no sense in proclaiming that. Under his directions she lighted the fire and prepared breakfast. Over a mug of tea he smiled at her.

"Merry Christmas, partner!"

"Oh— so it is. The same to you, of course."

"I'm so sorry you didn't hang up your stocking, but there's something to put in it when you get home." The shining yellow stone, smoothly rounded, made her gasp.

"Why— it's gold!"

"Looks like it."

"But— you shouldn't—"

"Lots more where they came from. When I caught my foot I went full tilt against that boulder, and as it was only poised, my weight pushed it over, and underneath "

"A gold mine?"

"Hardly that, but & nice little nest of nuggets—about five or six."

"Still," she hesitated. 'It's sweet of you, and—" It was in ha mind to be tactless again, but die refrained. "And I'll keep it always in memory of a very queer Christmas.

"I'm glad," he said simply.

"But I've nothing to give you."

"Don't you think you've done a lot already?"

"But—but supposing I hadn't come here?"

"That line of thought isn't very profitable," he said roughly. "You came, and if ever a good turn was misrewarded—"

"Is there such a word? Anyhow, who started it by feeding the lost orphan in the first place?"

"Madam, I had no choice. You demanded it. More tea, please."

"I know. It's a bad habit of mine, demanding." She filled his cup. "You see, I've had so much of my own way that I've grown to expect it." Idly, she turned over the pages of the book with which he had been filling in the sleepless hours since then. She stared as she saw the title-page, and the name thereon.

"Jerry Stanfield. Do you know him?"

"Why, do you?"

"N-No, but daddy knew his father. He used to own Lynton Vale, you know. Then Mr. Stanfield had a nervous breakdown through worry, and he died. Daddy was frightfully upset. If he had known what was happening he could have helped, but the Stanfields were awfully proud and independent, and no one guessed anything about it, until It happened."

"I see."

"So then daddy tried to find the son. He was abroad when his father died, but he had disappeared. There wasn't much money left from the sale of Lynton Vale. It all went to creditors."

"You seem very interested."

"Of course, I am. Daddy always talks about things to me, and, living here, I've heard all about the Stanfields, especially Jerry."

"Nothing good, I'll warrant."

"Now you're teasing. The district thought the world of them both. We're only interlopers. It isn't a nice feeling."

"Cheer up! You've interloped to some purpose as far as I am concerned."

Chin in hand, she continued to gaze at the river, and to his relief abandoned the subject.

"What are you going to do with your gold?" she asked.

"Buy mere bread and butter."

"And jam?"

"No jam— for a long time, because—" He broke off and stared at the river, too. How could he tell her that up to now he had hated her father's name intensely. His thought of Carey Faulkner had been that of a man who had profited by his friend's misfortunes; now he was beginning to wonder if he had been right. He roused himself from his musings.

"I hear voices," he said.

"But I thought we were shut in."

"These come from upstream. Your father may have found his way in through the forest. There, I heard it again. Let's coo-ee."

The result was an answering shout from the hillside, and Molly sprang to her feet. "It's daddy. I knew he'd come," she said softly; and then, with a little sob, she turned and ran down the shingle with a recklessness which courted disaster. Stanfield sighed as she passed from sight.

It had been a pleasant interlude, but it was over.

CAREY FAULKNER had other ideas, as he and the other searchers gathered about the injured man. There followed for Stanfield a long and tedious convalescence, for his foot had been badly damaged; but, with Molly as his nurse, he did not mind as much as he might have done in other care. When he was almost well be learned the true story of his father's failure.

"Pride and independence are fine lings," Carey Faulkner said gravely, "and I respect them, but carried to excess they can be damnable. God knows I would have given my right hand to have averted what happened, and what maddens me is that I could have prevented the trouble if your father had trusted me."

"Thank you," Jerry answered in a low voice. "And you've been a brick to me. So has Molly. I shall hate moving on."

"Why should you? Now—" The older in silenced the protest before it was uttered. "I'm not offering charity to your father's son. I wouldn't dare, but I need at Lynton Vale a manager whom I can trust. I don't know anyone more suited the job than yourself."

Stanfield's eyes lighted. "If I thought you really meant that "

Faulkner laughed. "Make your mind easy. I do. It's a business proposition. I can't be always here. My other interests suffer, and besides, I want to take Molly abroad for a year. Think it over,"

He left the verandah as Molly arrived, after giving her a meaning look.

"Has dad been breaking it to you?" she asked, drawing up her favourite low chair at Stanfield's side. He nodded.

"And you'll stay?" There was a shade anxiety in her voice, for even more than her father she realised that Jerry had all his father's pride.

"I'm sorely tempted." He paused. "And yet it wouldn't be cricket."

"Why ever not?"

"Well, it isn't exactly the manager's job make love to his employer's daughter, and I should want to all the time."

"Oh!"

"I had planned"— he bent forward eagerly— "to go away and make good somehow, and then some day I could come back and tell you all about it."

She frowned. "That sounds an awfully stupid proceeding to me," she answered.

"Then you don't—"

I never had any patience with the knights of old, who wanted to go careering all over the place while the lady stayed home." There was a mirthful look in his eyes, but her face was turned away from him.

"Then you think—"

"That it would have been much more fun for her if she had gone too."

"But in this case the lady goes."

"That's only daddy's idea— mine is different. Do you think I could spend a whole year away from Lynton Vale?"

"Only Lynton Vale?"

"Well"— she smiled roguishly— "not only!"

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7: Madagascar Ghost

David Wright O'Brien

(As by Clee Garson)

1918–1944

Fantastic Adventures, Dec 1942

One of the more remarkable as well as prolific pulp writers of the 1940s was David Wright O'Brien, whose first story appeared in late 1939, and who died in combat in WW2. Under several pseudonyms he wrote prolifically even while on active service. There is a large selection of his stories available online at Roy Glashan's Library

Foreword

ALTHOUGH this narrative concerns the fall of the port of Diego Suarez to the surprise attack of the British in the early part of 1942, the action of that memorable battle is but a background for the weird, though authentic, story that was enacted on the island of Madagascar during the attack on that vital French naval base.

This story was gleaned in part from two British Marines who were in the action which gained a certain obscure beachhead on the coast below Diego Suarez; from the papers that were found on the bodies of three Japanese naval officers after the battle was over; and from the tragic official history of a once brilliant soldier in the army of France who learned many years too late what patriotism meant.

Parts of this narrative are supposition. The bulk of it is fact. And, the suppositions fit so flawlessly into the few breaches in the facts that it seems hardly fair to consider them purely imaginary. Certainly there is no supposition in what was told to us by the British Marines. The records of the French Military Courts will also show, beyond any doubt, the veracity of our description of the case of Colonel Jacques Chambreaux. There are volumes obtainable in any library on the rites and witchcraft still prevalent in certain tribes of the Malagasy natives who inhabit many desolate sections of Madagascar.

However, though the background of the story occurred against the struggle for the naval base at Diego Suarez in the early part of 1942, the chain of circumstances which began this incredible narrative date somewhat farther back. It is best that we start at the very beginning therefore....

THERE were some who said that the sentence imposed on Colonel Jacques Chambreaux at the conclusion of his trial before the Military Court in Paris, 1927, was far too severe. True, the handsome colonel had been guilty of

certain indiscretions in revealing matters of some small military significance to the agents of alien powers. And, true, he had been paid well for his perfidy to his fatherland.

But it must be remembered that France was not then at war, and even the thought of another war, another bloody, draining conflict with any alien power for the centuries to come was ridiculous. Had not the final war been won? Were not the enemies of France beaten so utterly that they would never rise again?

"The colonel betrayed his uniform, his country and himself," many said. "But in fact he has not harmed France. Strip him of his uniform, therefore. Sentence him to penal servitude, then exile. That will be enough."

But the military tribunal was not of this mind. The sentence they imposed upon the shaken, gray-faced ex-officer was that of lifetime imprisonment in the bleakest of France's African penal colonies. Lifetime imprisonment in such a place was the same as a death decree.

And thus, in 1927, Jacques Chambreaux, ex-colonel of the French Military Intelligence Service, looked for the last time at the land of his birth as he was taken in chains to the certain death that waited in the festering heat of an African prison hell.

Somehow, through the bitter years that followed, Jacques Chambreaux, a gaunt, sunken-eyed ghost of a man who had aged a hundred years in eight, clung frantically to life, planning, plotting, waiting for the day of his escape. And after ten endless, hellish years, that day arrived.

There were three of them; a thin, rat-faced gangster from the Paris slums; a bald, fat, pig-eyed murderer from Bordeaux; and Jacques Chambreaux.

They made their escape at dawn, and cut their way through the treacherous jungles for twelve days, seeking the eastern coastline of Africa. A crocodile tore the leg from the rat-faced Parisian thug; and Chambreaux and the murderer from Bordeaux went onward, leaving their dying companion to be eaten by white ants. At the end of the ten days the last of their water gave out. And on the eleventh day, the big-bellied, pig-eyed Bordeaux murderer, collapsed in a whimpering agony of thirst and fatigue. Jacques Chambreaux, eyes glazed with fever sheen, stumbled on, leaving his last comrade where he fell.

On the twelfth day, Chambreaux found the coastline and the small, scantily-provisioned boat that had been left there by natives who'd been bribed before the escape.

He had done excellently, succeeded in the impossible. He'd had but a small compass and a knowledge of stellar reckoning. But of course this

Jacques Chambreaux had once been an officer in the army of France. His training had given him some advantage.

Chambreaux lay there on the beach for a day regaining his strength. It was all the time he could allow, in spite of the fever which was now raging through this parched body. He was not foolish enough to think that pursuit didn't follow. And so he dragged himself into that small, leaky, open boat, and with nothing but his pocket-compass, set out to cross the Mozambique Channel to Madagascar, a distance well over two hundred miles.

THE voyage that followed could not be counted in days. Agony of fever, the broiling brutality that was the sun, a storm in which the small remaining water cask was lost— these things were each an eternity of torture for Jacques Chambreaux. It was through chance and nothing more that his small boat was blown into a desolate cove on the western coast of northern Madagascar. And it was also by chance that boat and occupant were discovered by a band of scarcely civilized Malagasy jungle tribesmen.

Chambreaux was beyond delirium when these natives carried him from the beach cove into the jungle. He'd been unconscious for many hours before they had discovered him.

And so the penal fugitive, the bearded skeleton who had once been a colonel in the army of France, was beyond knowing or caring what was happening to him as these Malagasy tribesmen, eyes weirdly agleam in the torchlight, carried him along the jungle pathway to the throbbing drums sounding forth from their distant campfire.

Chambreaux was dying. The natives were aware of that. But the drums boomed, and around the fires the tribal witch doctors waited. This spectre of a white man must be brought to them. For had not the tribal Gods given this creature to them?

The Malagasy hurried on through the jungle blackness toward those booming drums, carrying ever so gently this strange offering from the Gods. The witch doctors would know....

CAPTAIN MATSUKI of the Imperial Japanese Navy was impatient. The blundering fool was already several hours late, and even though the distance from Diega Suarez through the jungle to this meeting point was considerable, the idiot should have reckoned with it and started on time to arrive as scheduled.

The captain was tall for a Japanese, lean and stiff-backed. His face was clean-shaven, even though he had been here in the jungle for a number of weeks. He wore glasses, a pith helmet, brown military shirt and brown

military shorts. His legs, to just below his ludicrously skinny brown knees, were encased in expensive leather boots.

Around the captain's waist was strapped a cartridge-belt and a holstered automatic pistol. A canteen, slung from his shoulder, dangled at his waist on the side opposite the holster.

From a distance, and ignoring the pistol, Captain Matsuki would give you the impression of a bewildered oriental Boy Scout. But that smooth-shaven face was hard, and his thin lips viciously sadistic in their set expression of anger. Even the thick lenses of his spectacles could not completely hide the arrogance and fanaticism that burned in his button eyes.

The captain had two companions, both lieutenants in the Imperial Japanese Navy. As befitting their lower rank they stood apart in the jungle clearing, watching their captain silently and with a little fright.

"The time passes," hissed the plump one of the two lieutenants, a short, moustached young Jap named Kushamo. "The time passes and that person is not yet here. Our captain's anger grows great."

The other lieutenant, small, dapper, and as young as Kushamo, nodded fearfully. "Perhaps he has been apprehended."

Lieutenant Kushamo shook his head. "It is not possible," he said firmly.

The dapper lieutenant, Tokamo by name, sucked his breath doubtfully and said nothing to this.

In the foreground of the clearing, Captain Matsuki turned in impatient irritation on his young lieutenants.

"Fools!" he snapped. "Must you hiss and gossip like younger sisters?"

Dapper little Lieutenant Tokamo coughed, averting his eyes. Fat young Lieutenant Kushamo removed his pith helmet and mopped his brow with his sleeve, concentrating his gaze on the trees overhead.

Captain Matsuki turned his attention back to the jungle pathway, reaching for a cigarette, lighting it, and glancing again at his wrist watch.

And at that instant the breathless messenger stumbled from the trail into the clearing.

The man was older man than the captain and the lieutenants. He was small, almost incredibly thin, with flesh that was arriving at the dryness of parchment. He was Japanese.

"So!" Captain Matsuki snapped. "At last you come!" He glared at the breathless, scrawny older man who stood gasping before him.

"I could not help myself, honorable Captain," the messenger gasped pleadingly. "Much happens in the port of Diego Suarez. Rumors are everywhere, and the French have doubled the guards throughout the city."

The captain's lips went flat against his teeth in an expression that was not intended for a smile.

"The Americans," he said. "They expect them, eh?"

The messenger shook his head doubtfully. "None know," he panted. "Some say it will be the pig English who will come. But attack is expected, and soon. Of that there is no doubt."

"Then we cannot leave too quickly," Captain Matsuki declared. "You arranged for the boat that will pick us up?"

The messenger nodded. "That has been arranged."

"How far distant from here will it be?"

"A day and a half journey," the messenger said.

The captain turned, waving his hand for Lieutenants Kushamo and Tokamo to join him. To them he repeated what the messenger had told him.

"It is therefore imperative that we return with the information we have gathered," the captain concluded, "before any such attack by either the British or American dogs is made on Diego Suarez. Had my suggestions before the Imperial Strategy Board but a month ago been heeded, Japan would at this moment be ready to strike before the dogs of the United Nations. Madagascar would then be ours."

"You think the attack is coming, honorable Captain?" plump Lieutenant Kushamo had the temerity to ask.

Captain Matsuki turned on him with biting sarcasm. "Do you think the words of this fool messenger are jest?" he demanded. "Do you think the fact that I persuaded my superiors to permit me this secret mission was based on anything else than the assumption that the United Nations will try to seize Madagascar? Do you think that the refusal of the French swine at Diego Suarez to accept Japanese or German troops to help them should such an attack be ventured was based on anything more than their own realization that the attempt is near?"

Lieutenant Kushamo bowed before the lash of the captain's words, not venturing reply.

But Matsuki continued, apparently releasing some of the rancor that he'd felt at the stupidity of his superiors in not realizing the clarity of the picture as well as he had.

"But you could be excused for your ignorance, Kushamo. You are after all but an underling. My superiors were inexcusably negligent in not heeding my advice. Through their deafness, they will find that the United Nations will seize this island before our forces have time to act."

"But our very mission," put in dapper young Lieutenant Tokamo, "that of finding suitable territory for parachute invasion, has been successfully

accomplished. When we supply the information we have gathered here to our superiors, they will be pleased."

Captain Matsuki glared at his underling. He had long considered Lieutenant Tokamo almost insolent and far too ambitious. It occurred to the captain that perhaps he had been unwise in criticizing his superiors before one as likely to talk as Tokamo. But his anger forced him to snap a reply.

"They will be pleased," he said, "and able to take this island from the United Nations at great cost and at a later date. But had they planned to beat the British or Americans to its seizure, they would have found the cost incredibly small, the capture easy."

Dapper Lieutenant Tokamo said nothing to this. He smiled slightly, and the Captain's irritation and suspicion was increased by that smile.

The captain turned on the messenger.

"It is decided, then, that we start at once for our meeting with the vessel which will take us from this accursed island before it falls into completely hostile hands. You will guide us."

The messenger nodded. "As you wish, honorable Captain. But perhaps if we were to wait until nightfall, we would find that we'd time our journey so as to pass through a slightly dangerous marsh section by day."

"We will start immediately," Captain Matsuki declared in cold irritation. He turned to the Lieutenants Kushamo and Tokamo, as if defying them to suggest any other course.

"I shall break our camp, Captain," Lieutenant Kushamo said meekly. Lieutenant Tokamo merely smiled faintly again, to the growing irritation of Captain Matsuki....

THE British Marines on the deck of the low-slung little troop carrier, sat with backs against a series of starboard hatch covers, cupping their cigarettes in their palms as they smoked, in compliance with general dim-out orders aboard the ship.

Tension had been high throughout the carrier all that day, for all the men were completely aware that they were very close to their destination.

A wiry little cockney corporal voiced the sentiments of his regiment conversationally.

"The blinking zero hour's creeping up on us, m'lads. We'll have our spot of action before another night is over."

A Canadian youth grinned at this.

"I've wondered what sort of scrap those Frenchies are capable of putting up. Well know damned soon."

"Blimey, they'll fight orlright," the cockney corporal promised. "They'll fight to beat hell, for the principle of the thing if nothing more. We'll have a tiff of it."

"They made a mess of it in France," the Canadian youth ventured. "I can't see how they'll do much more here."

The cockney corporal shook his head. "In France they was sold down the river by their own politicians, my boy. They was too confused to know right from left, an 'itler's panzers ran over 'em before they found out. 'Ere it's different. These 'ere are French colonials. The best French fighters. You'll find out."

"If you ask me," persisted the Canadian youth, "they ought to be glad to see us coming instead of the Japs."

The cockney corporal grinned. "If you ask me, they will be glad to see us as is coming, instead of them Japs. But they'll fight nonetheless. Them Frenchies is all tangled up in their minds. They've been sold out at 'ome, and 'aven't got it quite clear now as to wot they're fighting for. But they'll fight."

The Canadian youth grinned. "I hope so. I'm itching for a real go," he declared.

"You've not long to wait," the cockney corporal promised....

GASTON PRÉNEAU, soldier of France, lounged nonchalantly against the side of a machine-gun emplacement just at the fringe of a remote Madagascar beach.

Préneau was calm enough for a man who had listened more than two months to the rumors of a possible attack on this colonial possession of his country.

From his superior officers Préneau had learned to scoff at such rumors and, although admitting their possibility, deride their probability.

"Not right now," he told himself. "Not at this time. We are not a strong garrison, but we are well defended. There are the shoals, and mines and reefs to protect any possible landing beach-heads from invasion."

Préneau told himself this again, as he turned lazily to peer out at the heavy fog-mists that shrouded the beach. Told himself again, while wishing with all his heart and soul for the simple pleasure of a cigarette.

Ever since the entrance of the Jap dogs into the world conflict, when the British blockade of Madagascar had begun, Préneau had felt increasingly the lack of such luxury-necessity items as cigarettes. True enough, there were occasional cigarettes to be had in the shops at Diego Suarez itself. But here on outpost duty, one had little chance to keep a sufficient supply on hand. And now, with his own stock already exhausted over a week, Préneau found

himself rather wishing that somehow all this would end. The fever point of excitement in Madagascar had lasted too long already. The speculation as to who would strike at them, and when, had gone too far for mere speculation.

As for himself, Préneau felt more and more with each passing day that perhaps an invasion— by forces other than the hated Jap— would be a welcome relief.

There would be the necessity of defending French honor with battle, of course. Préneau knew this. He had been a colonial soldier of France too long to think of smokeless surrender.

"Yes," he thought aloud, "we will fight if the British come. If the Americans come," he shrugged, "perhaps not. But in any case, we fight to the death should the yellow Jap come."

Préneau speculated on how good a cigarette would taste, and realized that the coming of either the Americans or British would mean a dropping of the blockade and a return of plentiful supplies for the garrison and the people in Diego Suarez.

He sighed and stretched, and turned completely to gaze down at the beach cove, leaning on the sandbagging of the emplacement with his elbows.

To his ears, faintly, came the throb of jungle drums. He frowned. The Malagasy tribe in this locality had been hard at their stupid rites for over two days and nights, now. He'd heard those drums off and on ever since then.

"At least," he told himself wearily, "we have no trouble from them. A small boon for which one can be thankful."

And as if in answer, the drums continued to throb dully in the distance. Gaston Préneau sighed. Such an annoyance to one who slept as lightly as he....

THE small party had halted for rest at a fork in the jungle trail. Captain Matsuki, sitting apart from the rest, fixed his guide, the Jap messenger of that afternoon, with a contemptuous gaze.

"Tell me, my muddle-head," the captain asked sarcastically, "why is it you find territory you are supposed to know well so confusing?"

The messenger, eyes fixed on the ground, answered without looking up.

"I have tried to explain, honorable one, that something has been changed in the trail markings. The Malagasy tribe in this vicinity obviously is engaged in some strange rites. And on such occasions they sometimes unaccountably— perhaps to hide their tribal camp— tamper with trail markings. I am forced to go more slowly than usual because of this fact."

"Your hide will be worthless should you so delay us as to miss contact with the boat," Captain Matsuki said angrily. "Keep that in your slow mind, fool."

Captain Matsuki saw his lieutenants, Tokamo and Kushamo, whispering together a few yards away. His anger grew greater. He rose to his feet and stepped swiftly across the trail until he stood above them.

"I shall find much to report on the aides assigned me when we return!" Matsuki flared. "Neither of you has been capable of anything but stupidity and woman gossip since we have been here!"

The captain wheeled to the old guide.

"We must get on again. There is no chance for rest since you are so slow. I cannot risk missing that boat."

Suddenly, as the others rose, from deep in the jungle came the throb of native drums.

"The Malagasy rites again," the old guide said. "The drums sound nearer than before."

"We have not time to be concerned with the ignorant monkey ceremonies of natives!" Captain Matsuki snarled. "Please remember that. And speed your doddering steps, ancient one!"

Wordlessly, the lieutenants fell in behind their captain, who in turn had stepped behind the old Japanese who guided them along the trail. The night had deadened some of the oppressive heat of the jungle, but inside of a hundred yards each of the party was once more drenched in sweat.

The drums continued to throb ceaselessly during the next two hours of their trek; and on two occasions the old guide stopped, as if listening, gulping nervously before going on.

Another hour passed, and it was shortly after this that the old guide at their lead stopped suddenly in a small clearing, his eyes wide with fear as he turned back to face Captain Matsuki.

He opened his mouth to speak, but no words came.

"Well?" Matsuki spat.

The old man found voice. "The drums, honorable Captain. Do they not seem louder, clearer than before?"

Captain Matsuki's lips went tight.

"Of course, fool! What has that to do with our route?"

The old Japanese seemed to choke on the words he stammered. "I am afraid, honorable Captain, that we are lost!"

Captain Matsuki stared at the old man for fully a minute, his eyes flashing cold hate behind the thick lenses of his spectacles. Save for the drums in the distance, throbbing more loudly now, there was nothing but silence.

"Dog!" Captain Matsuki hissed. "This then is the climax of your ten bungling years on this island as a secret servant to the Son of Heaven?"

"The tribal— " the old man started.

But the captain had his pistol from its holster in a split second. He fired from the hip, twice, both shots burying themselves within a quarter inch of each other in the old man's forehead. The old man fell face forward to the jungle path.

CAPTAIN MATSUKI replaced his smoking gun in its holster, his eyes flashing wrath as he turned on his open-mouthed lieutenants.

"We have our compasses," he grated. "They will serve us better than the fool of whom we are now rid. If we reach the coastline we can follow the beaches to the rendezvous arranged. The old fool told me its location."

Lieutenant Tokamo answered him. "We have our compasses, truly, honorable captain. Nonetheless, between the coastline and ourselves lie swampland and many lagoons. It might have been wiser to let the old man live, since at least he was aware of the terrain."

Captain Matsuki blinked at this arrogant defiance. Then his lips went tight, and his hand slipped toward his holster. His dapper young lieutenant, however, imitated the gesture, dropping his hand to his own gun.

"The captain will forgive my *suggestions*," Lieutenant Tokamo said silkily. "But I believe you have needlessly endangered our mission and our cause."

Captain Matsuki's eyes were fixed on his underling's gun hand, still held inches from his holster. He wet his lips, his eyes moving to the plump, round faced, moustached Lieutenant Kushamo. Young Kushamo's expression, somewhat frightened, nevertheless indicated that he was playing a strictly neutral role.

"If you imagine—" Matsuki began, turning his eyes back to dapper Lieutenant Tokamo.

Lieutenant Kushamo's gasp cut off the sentence his captain had started. The eyes of both Lieutenant Tokamo and Captain Matsuki went to the plump lieutenant.

Kushamo was pointing, jaw agape, at a figure standing in the darkness of the trail bend just ahead of them. Pointing and staring in wide eyed horror.

They stood there, all three of them, numb with astonishment as a figure advanced, lurching toward them, as if operated puppet-like by wires.

The figure was a creature of rags and filth, a bearded skeleton of a human being; a staring, expressionless spectre of a man. And as he moved toward them, his lurching robot-like walk seemed to have affinity to the rhythm of the jungle drums in the distance.

Captain Matsuki was the first to speak.

"Halt!" he cried. "Who are you? Identify yourself!" Forgetting himself he spoke in Japanese. Now he repeated his command in French.

The creature continued toward them, apparently unhearing, and the captain, his voice rising a notch, squealed his command in English.

But the strange figure didn't halt. His deep, sunken hollows of eyes stared straight ahead, his shambling steps lurched ever forward, the death mask that was his face fixed vacantly on nothingness.

He was less than a dozen yards away when Captain Matsuki whipped his gun from the holster at his side, pointing it dead bead on the tattered spectre.

"Halt!" Matsuki shrieked, "or I fire!"

IT WAS Lieutenant Tokamo who stepped quickly in between his captain and the advancing stranger. Stepped in between to knock the barrel of Matsuki's gun aside.

"Do not be a fool, captain!" young Tokamo grated. "This strange person is unarmed. He cannot harm us. He looks to be the ravages left of a white man long gone jungle-mad. We can force him to guide us to the coastline!"

The captain glared at his lieutenant, lips working in wrath and indignation at what amounted to open rebellion by young Tokamo.

"He is right, captain!" It was fat little Kushamo's voice that broke forth now. "This strange person can well guide us to the coastline, through the stinking lagoons and past the worst swamplands."

Captain Matsuki did the only thing he could; he nodded, shoving his gun back into its holster.

"Perhaps you are right, Tokamo," he said. "I will question this person." But the captain had lost face, and all three of them knew it.

Matsuki turned to the still slowly advancing tattered stranger, holding up his hand.

"Halt!" Matsuki shouted in French. And for the first time the gaunt, filthy travesty of a human being seemed to hear. The shuffling, robot-like steps of the creature slowed draggingly, then stopped. He stood there in the clearing, perhaps six feet from the three Japanese, swaying slightly, those sunken eyes staring unseeingly straight ahead.

"Who are you?" Matsuki demanded.

There was no answer. The creature still swayed stupidly before them, his death mask of a face expressionless behind the filthy matting of white beard.

"Who are you? Speak up!" Matsuki cried again.

There was a sudden croaking, half-human noise rattling in the throat of the tattered parody of a man. That was all.

Matsuki turned on Tokamo. "What did he say?"

The dapper young lieutenant shook his head.

"I could not understand."

"It matters not," Matsuki decided. "Can you direct us to the coastline, idiot?" he demanded.

The creature swayed there, unanswering, apparently uncomprehending.

Again Matsuki repeated his question. The result was no better the second time. Tokamo stepped up.

"We might make signs," the dapper young lieutenant said, "to indicate to this mad person what it is we want."

Slowly, then, with infinite patience, Tokamo began a sign ritual before the stranger. He repeated his gestures perhaps a dozen times, until at last the sunken eyes of the thing seemed to be aware of what he was trying to convey. There was another rattling, unintelligible croak from the throat of the mad person, and a gesture that seemed to mean a nod. Tokamo turned triumphantly to his captain.

"The mad person understands," he said. "We must follow him. I am certain he will lead us to the coastline."

Matsuki was about to open his mouth in protest, when the weird creature turned and started across the small clearing in the direction from which he had originally come. He had gone some ten feet, then stopped, swaying, looking back over his shoulder.

"You see?" said Tokamo excitedly. "He means for us to follow him!"

Matsuki muttered something unintelligible, and the three started out after the filthy, tattered spectre that was the new guide. The mad person, on seeing that they followed, turned again and lurched onward, his steps still strangely in time with the cadence of the booming jungle drums in the distance....

SEVERAL hours had passed, and the three still followed their strange guide through the tangled trail forks of the jungle. For the past two hours the drums had been growing increasingly loud in their ears, until even cocky young Tokamo had exchanged several pale, speculative glances with his captain.

The mad person, still shuffling at that awkward gait, remained ahead of them, pausing only so often to see that they still followed. And the route over which he took them was rapidly exhausting the three Japs.

It was Matsuki who at last expressed their fears in words.

"If this route leads to the coastline," he grumbled suspiciously, "it is a roundabout one. And those drums grow far too strong to suit me." He glared accusingly at Tokamo, as if all this were his fault.

The dapper lieutenant returned Matsuki's accusing stare. "You were able to choose or not, honorable captain."

It was then that the drums ceased booming. Quite completely. The utter silence in the jungle was suddenly nerve shattering.

All three halted, staring at one another wordlessly. A few yards ahead of them, their spectre-like guide had paused also, as if listening.

And then Kushamo spoke, excitedly.

"Hear it, ever so faintly, the noise of surf in the distance? We are somewhere near the coastline!"

Captain Matsuki bent his head. "Yes, I think, but— "

The savage whooping yells cut him off. In fact they blanketed the trail section in a bedlam of noise and confusion. Shrill, wildly blood-lusting, the shrieks came from everywhere around them.

And then the Malagasy were all around the three Jap officers. Malagasy, bearing knives, spears and clubs.

Matsuki only had time to grab frantically for the holstered pistol at his side. And in the corner of his vision he saw their mad guide, the tattered, filthy, half-human jungle creature, swaying there on the trail ahead of them, staring blankly at the ambush he had led them into.

Captain Matsuki cursed, and went quite a little mad himself. His gun was in his hand, kicking back with each of the three shots he sent crashing toward the tattered madman.

Then stinking brown arms were wrapped tightly around Matsuki's body, and he was hurled heavily to the earth. The shouting and shrieking were even louder than before, and the Jap captain knew that Tokamo and Kushamo were also buried beneath the avalanche of brown fury that had descended on them.

Hideous, painted faces leered down at Captain Matsuki, and thongs bit deep into his legs and wrists and ankles. And then he knew that they were not going to kill him— yet. He knew, and wished to his Shinto gods that he had saved for himself the shots he'd sent crashing into the mad one.

The drums began to crash loudly all around them again, and Matsuki, Tokamo and Kushamo, trussed helplessly to poles carried by painted Malagasy, were carried off into the jungle darkness.

At the side of the trail, those sunken eyes still staring blankly, his filthy, tattered body bent just a little forward, swayed the mad person who had guided them.

In his chest there were three separate holes, bullet holes from Matsuki's shots. A black ooze seeped from each of them. An ooze that was not at all like blood....

THE small landing boats slipped silently into the coastal beach cove. The British Marines, crouching low in the gunwales, peered through the soupy fog as best they could, holding their breaths and counting off the passing seconds.

Any moment now. The guns of the French behind the emplacements just back on the beach were not in action yet, proving that they were still unaware of the coming attack.

It was the hour just before dawn. The hour when the fog was thickest, steaming up from the jungle and in from the sea. The cockney corporal nudged the young Canadian beside him.

"All set, lad?" he whispered.

The Canadian youth, now unsmiling, face taut, merely nodded. The boats slipped on through the water. Now they were inside the cove harbor itself.

And then the drums boomed forth.

Drums, shouting, savage yells, and suddenly three flaring fires shooting skyward on the beach, as if from three gigantic torches. The machine guns on the beach emplacements began then, chattering a sudden angry staccato of death. And the men in the small boats slipping up toward the beach caught their first glimpses of the brown, painted, leaping figures around those gigantic flaming torches.

They heard next the shrill screams of pain from those leaping painted brown men, screams of pain and death as the machine guns continued to chatter.

"Something on the beach," the cockney corporal gasped, "something looking awfully close to native trouble. Those machine guns aren't firing at us. The Frenchies are firing right into that swarm of 'owling natives!"

It was all over amazingly soon. The savages still alive fled in confusion to the jungle, leaving their dead littering the beach. The machine-gun fire changed to tommy-gun pursuit as the French soldiers on the beach emplacements chased the Malagasy back into the jungle. The drums had stopped completely, and the gigantic torches burned high, giving the British Marines perfect assistance in landing on the beach-head.

When the French returned from their chase of the Malagasy, the British had landed and had their garrison very well in hand. A few sporadic exchanges of shots— for the purposes of honor— and it was at an end.

It was then that they turned their attention to extinguishing the huge ceremonial torches which had been set on the beach by the Malagasy. The cockney corporal and his young Canadian friend were part of the detail assigned to this task. The job didn't take long, but it proved extremely sickening when the torches were removed from the tops of the poles.

The torches had been human bodies. Scarcely recognizable bodies now, true enough, with just enough left of the charred remains to show they had once been the bodies of three Japanese.

Papers found in the clothing, stripped from the three human torches and left on the beach, identified the Japanese as naval officers in the service of the Son of Heaven. There was a Captain Matsuki, a Lieutenant Tokamo, and another Lieutenant Kushamo.

And scarcely fifteen minutes after this unpleasant task had been concluded, the cockney corporal and his young Canadian friend were assigned to either side of the cove-heads, just in case there was any further mopping up to be done.

It was the corporal who sighted the decrepit little open boat with the useless, tattered sail. It was drifting almost without direction just off the end of the cove harbor opening, and there was someone in it.

The corporal shouted three times for the occupant of the boat to rise with both hands above his head. But the dimly outlined figure in the small drifting boat seemed only to crouch lower in the stern.

So the corporal was forced to fire.

FROM a range of twenty yards he couldn't miss. Two shots, each boring into the skull of the boat's occupant, did the trick. And then the corporal managed to bring the little craft into the bank.

It was then that the corpora! almost lost his dinner for the second time in half an hour. The corporal was hardy, and a soldier, but the charred bodies which had served as torches were gruesomely sickening enough— and this decaying, tattered, long-dead shell of a human being that he found in the stern of the little boat was almost too much.

For the body *must* have been dead for some time. The stench was hideous. The corporal identified his own two bullet holes in the skull of the creature, and another three holes in its chest.

"Oo else 'as shot this bloody, bloomin' corpse?" the corporal shuddered.

And then he wondered aloud: "And 'ow did it get here?"

He found the small wrist band, then. Green and moldly, and he had to close his eyes when he removed it from the corpse. Later, when he scraped it off, it proved to be an identification tag.

But by the time the corporal had dragged the body in the boat around to the beach for the inspection of his superior officers, it had quite impossibly decomposed.

The corporal's protestations were in vain. His superior officers knew better than to believe that this body, obviously dead for a matter of at least four years, could have been in the state of preservation the corporal said it was when he first found it.

"Dead men can't be kept alive for that long, old boy," one officer told the corporal kindly. "What you saw in the boat was just the same decayed human rubble you brought to us. You must have been the victim of an optical illusion."

Quite possibly, the superior officer was correct. Dead bodies *shouldn't* remain in the state of living bodies for that many years then suddenly decompose. They shouldn't, even though written legend has it that certain tribes of the Malagasy natives practice the black witchcraft of zombie-ism and death suspension.

But later, when the corporal told his tale in the bars at Diego Suarez, displaying the green molded identification tag he'd taken from the corpse before it crumbled in decay, there were some who blinked in astonishment at the name on it.

The name that read:

Jacques Chambreaux, Col. M.I.S.

8: The Face on the Wall

E. V. Lucas

1868-1938

Euroa Gazette (Victoria) 10 Aug 1915

British essayist, novelist, playwright, poet and editor

WE WERE talking of the supernatural— that unprofitable but endlessly alluring theme— and most of us had cited an instance, without, however, producing much effect.

Among the strangers to me was a little man with an anxious white face, whom Rudson-Wayte had brought, and he watched each speaker with the closest attention, but said nothing. Then Dabney, wishing to include him in the talk, turned and asked him if he had no experience to relate, no story that contained an inexplicable element.

He thought a moment.

'Well,' he said, 'not a story in the ordinary sense of the word; nothing, that is, from hearsay, like most of your examples. Truth, I always hold, is not only vastly stranger than fiction, but also vastly more interesting. I could tell you an occurrence which happened to me personally, and which oddly enough completed itself only this afternoon.'

We begged him to begin.

'A year or two ago,' he said, 'I was in room in Great Ormond-street— an old house on the Holborn side. The bedroom walls had been distempered by a previous tenant, but the place was damp and great patches of discolouration had broken out. One of these— as indeed often happens— was exactly like a human face; but more faithfully and startingly like than is customary. Lying in bed in the morning, putting off getting up, I used to watch it and watch it, and gradually I came to think of it as real— as my fellow lodger, in fact. The odd thing was that while the patches on the walls grew larger and changed their contours, this never did. It remained identically the same.

'While there, I had a very bad attack of influenza, with complications, and all day long I had nothing to do but read or meditate, and it was then that this fate began to get a firmer hold of me. It grew more and more real and remarkable. I may say that it dominated my thoughts day and night. There was a curious turn to the nose, and the slant ot the forehead was unique. It was, in fact, full of individuality; the face of a man apart, a man in a thousand.

'Well, I got better, but the face slill controlled me. I found myself searching the streets for one like it. Somewhere, I was convinced, the real man must exist, and him I must meet. Why, I had no notion; I only knew that he and I were in some way linked by fate. I frequented places where men congregated

in large numbers— political meetings, football matches, and railway stations when the suburban trains pour forth the legions on the city in the morning, and receive them again in the evening. But all in vain. I had never before realised, as I then did, how many different faces of men there are, and how few. For all differ, and yet, classified, they belong to. only as many groups as you can count on your hands.

'The search became a mania with me. I neglected everything else. I stood at busy corners watching the crowd until people thought me mad, and the police began to know me and be suspicious. Women I never glanced at; men, men, men, all the time.'

He passed his hand wearily over his brow.

'And then,' he continued, 'at last I saw him. He was in a taxi, driving east along Piccadilly. I turned and ran beside it for a little way and then saw an empty one approaqhing. "Follow that taxi," I excitedly gasped, and leaped in. The driver managed to keep it in sight and it took me to Charing Cross. I rushed on to the platform and found my man with two ladies and a little girl. They were going to France by the 2.30. I hung about to try and get a word with him, but in vain. Other friends had joined, the party, and they moved to the train In a solid body.

'I hastily purchased a ticket to Folkestone, hoping that I should catch him on the boat before it sailed; but at Folkestone he got on board before me with his friend, and they disappeared into a large private saloon, several cabins thrown into one. Evidently he was a man of wealth.

'Again I was foiled, but I determined to cross, too, feeling certain that when the voyage begun he would leave the ladies and come out for a stroll on the deck. I had only just enough for the single fare to Boulogne, but nothing could shake me now. I took up my position opposite the saloon door, and waited. After half an hour the door opened and he came out, but with the little girl. My heart beat so that it seemed to shake the boat more than the propeller. There was no mistaking the face— every line was the same. He glanced at me and moved towards the companionway for the lower deck.

'It was now or never. I said "Excuse me, but would you mind giving me your card ? I have a very important reason for wishing to communicate with you."

'He seemed to be astonished as, indeed, well he might ; but he complied. With extreme deliberation he. to.ok put his case and handed me his card and hurried on with the little girl. It was clear that he thought me a lunatic, and considered it wiser to humour me than not.

'Clutching the card I hurried to a deserted .corner of the ship and read it. My eyes dimmed; my head swam; for on it was the words: *Mr. Ormond Wall*, with an address at Pittsburg, U.S.A. I remember no more until I found myself in

a hospital at Boulogne. There I lay in a broken condition for some weeks, and only a month ago did I return.'

He was silent. We looked at him and one another and waited. All the other talk of the evening was nothing compared with the story of the little pale man.

'I went back,' he resumed, after a moment or so, 'to Great Ormond-street and set to wort to discover all I could about this American in whose life I had so mysteriously intervened. I wrote to Pittsburg; I wrote to American editors; I cultivated the society of Americans in London; but all that I could find out was that he was an American millionaire with English parents, who had resided in London. But where? To that question I received no answer.

'And so the time went on until yesterday morning. I had gone to bed more than usually tired and slept till late. When I woke the sun was streaming into the room. As I always do, I looked at once at the wall on which the face is to be seen. I rubbed my eyes and sprang up in alarm. It was only faintly visible. Last night it had been as clear as ever— almost could hear it speak. And now it was but a ghost itself.

'I got up dazed and dejected and went out. .The early editions of the evening papers were already out, and on, the contents bill I saw, 'American Millionaire's Motor Accident.' You most all of you have seen it. I bought it and read at once what I knew I should read. Mr. Ormond Wall, the Pittsburg millionaire, and i party, motoring from Spezia to Pisa, had come into collision with a waggon, and were overturned. Mr. Wall's condition was critical.

'I went back to my room still a good deal dazed, and sat on the bed looking with unseeing eyes at the face on the wall. And even as I looked, suddenly it completely disappeared. Later, I found that Mr. Wall had succumbed to his injuries at what I take to be that very moment.'

Again he was silent.

'Most remarkable,' we said; 'it is most extraordinary,' and so forth, and we meant it, too.

'Yes,' said the stranger. 'There are three extraordinary, three most remarkable, things about my story. One is that it should be possible for the discolouration in a lodging house in London not only to form the features of a gentleman in America, but to have this intimate association with his existence. It would take science some time to explain that. Another is that the gentleman's name should bear any relation to the spot on which his features were being so curiously reproduced by some mysterious agency. Is it not so?'

We agreed with him, and our original discussion on supernatural manifestations set in again with inincreased excitement, during which the narrator of the amazing experience rose and said good-night. Just as he was at the doot, one of the company recalled us to the cause of our excited debate by

asking him, before he left, what he considered the third extraordinary thing in connection with his deeply interesting story.

'Oh, the third thing,' he said, as he opened the door. 'I was forgetting that. The third extraordinary thing about the story is that I made it up about, half an hour ago. Goodnight again.'

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9: The Lottery Ticket

Anton Chekhov

1860-1904

Tr. *Constance Garnett*, 1861-1946

First Published in Russian: 9 March 1887

In: *The Wife, and other stories*, 1898

IVAN DMITRITCH, a middle-class man who lived with his family on an income of twelve hundred a year and was very well satisfied with his lot, sat down on the sofa after supper and began reading the newspaper.

"I forgot to look at the newspaper today," his wife said to him as she cleared the table. "Look and see whether the list of drawings is there."

"Yes, it is," said Ivan Dmitritch; "but hasn't your ticket lapsed?"

"No; I took the interest on Tuesday."

"What is the number?"

"Series 9,499, number 26."

"All right... we will look... 9,499 and 26."

Ivan Dmitritch had no faith in lottery luck, and would not, as a rule, have consented to look at the lists of winning numbers, but now, as he had nothing else to do and as the newspaper was before his eyes, he passed his finger downwards along the column of numbers. And immediately, as though in mockery of his scepticism, no further than the second line from the top, his eye was caught by the figure 9,499! Unable to believe his eyes, he hurriedly dropped the paper on his knees without looking to see the number of the ticket, and, just as though some one had given him a douche of cold water, he felt an agreeable chill in the pit of the stomach; tingling and terrible and sweet!

"Masha, 9,499 is there!" he said in a hollow voice.

His wife looked at his astonished and panic-stricken face, and realized that he was not joking.

"9,499?" she asked, turning pale and dropping the folded tablecloth on the table.

"Yes, yes... it really is there!"

"And the number of the ticket?"

"Oh, yes! There's the number of the ticket too. But stay... wait! No, I say! Anyway, the number of our series is there! Anyway, you understand...."

Looking at his wife, Ivan Dmitritch gave a broad, senseless smile, like a baby when a bright object is shown it. His wife smiled too; it was as pleasant to her as to him that he only mentioned the series, and did not try to find out the number of the winning ticket. To torment and tantalize oneself with hopes of possible fortune is so sweet, so thrilling!

"It is our series," said Ivan Dmitritch, after a long silence. "So there is a probability that we have won. It's only a probability, but there it is!"

"Well, now look!"

"Wait a little. We have plenty of time to be disappointed. It's on the second line from the top, so the prize is seventy-five thousand. That's not money, but power, capital! And in a minute I shall look at the list, and there—26! Eh? I say, what if we really have won?"

The husband and wife began laughing and staring at one another in silence. The possibility of winning bewildered them; they could not have said, could not have dreamed, what they both needed that seventy-five thousand for, what they would buy, where they would go. They thought only of the figures 9,499 and 75,000 and pictured them in their imagination, while somehow they could not think of the happiness itself which was so possible.

Ivan Dmitritch, holding the paper in his hand, walked several times from corner to corner, and only when he had recovered from the first impression began dreaming a little.

"And if we have won," he said— "why, it will be a new life, it will be a transformation! The ticket is yours, but if it were mine I should, first of all, of course, spend twenty-five thousand on real property in the shape of an estate; ten thousand on immediate expenses, new furnishing... travelling... paying debts, and so on.... The other forty thousand I would put in the bank and get interest on it."

"Yes, an estate, that would be nice," said his wife, sitting down and dropping her hands in her lap.

"Somewhere in the Tula or Oryol provinces.... In the first place we shouldn't need a summer villa, and besides, it would always bring in an income."

And pictures came crowding on his imagination, each more gracious and poetical than the last. And in all these pictures he saw himself well-fed, serene, healthy, felt warm, even hot! Here, after eating a summer soup, cold as ice, he lay on his back on the burning sand close to a stream or in the garden under a lime-tree.... It is hot.... His little boy and girl are crawling about near him, digging in the sand or catching ladybirds in the grass. He dozes sweetly, thinking of nothing, and feeling all over that he need not go to the office today, tomorrow, or the day after. Or, tired of lying still, he goes to the hayfield, or to the forest for mushrooms, or watches the peasants catching fish with a net. When the sun sets he takes a towel and soap and saunters to the bathing-shed, where he undresses at his leisure, slowly rubs his bare chest with his hands, and goes into the water. And in the water, near the opaque soapy circles, little fish flit to and fro and green water-weeds nod their heads. After

bathing there is tea with cream and milk rolls.... In the evening a walk or vint with the neighbours.

"Yes, it would be nice to buy an estate," said his wife, also dreaming, and from her face it was evident that she was enchanted by her thoughts.

Ivan Dmitritch pictured to himself autumn with its rains, its cold evenings, and its St. Martin's summer. At that season he would have to take longer walks about the garden and beside the river, so as to get thoroughly chilled, and then drink a big glass of vodka and eat a salted mushroom or a soused cucumber, and then— drink another.... The children would come running from the kitchen-garden, bringing a carrot and a radish smelling of fresh earth.... And then, he would lie stretched full length on the sofa, and in leisurely fashion turn over the pages of some illustrated magazine, or, covering his face with it and unbuttoning his waistcoat, give himself up to slumber.

The St. Martin's summer is followed by cloudy, gloomy weather. It rains day and night, the bare trees weep, the wind is damp and cold. The dogs, the horses, the fowls— all are wet, depressed, downcast. There is nowhere to walk; one can't go out for days together; one has to pace up and down the room, looking despondently at the grey window. It is dreary!

Ivan Dmitritch stopped and looked at his wife.

"I should go abroad, you know, Masha," he said.

And he began thinking how nice it would be in late autumn to go abroad somewhere to the South of France... to Italy.... to India!

"I should certainly go abroad too," his wife said. "But look at the number of the ticket!"

"Wait, wait!..."

He walked about the room and went on thinking. It occurred to him: what if his wife really did go abroad? It is pleasant to travel alone, or in the society of light, careless women who live in the present, and not such as think and talk all the journey about nothing but their children, sigh, and tremble with dismay over every farthing. Ivan Dmitritch imagined his wife in the train with a multitude of parcels, baskets, and bags; she would be sighing over something, complaining that the train made her head ache, that she had spent so much money.... At the stations he would continually be having to run for boiling water, bread and butter.... She wouldn't have dinner because of its being too dear....

"She would begrudge me every farthing," he thought, with a glance at his wife. "The lottery ticket is hers, not mine! Besides, what is the use of her going abroad? What does she want there? She would shut herself up in the hotel, and not let me out of her sight.... I know!"

And for the first time in his life his mind dwelt on the fact that his wife had grown elderly and plain, and that she was saturated through and through with the smell of cooking, while he was still young, fresh, and healthy, and might well have got married again.

"Of course, all that is silly nonsense," he thought; "but... why should she go abroad? What would she make of it? And yet she would go, of course.... I can fancy... In reality it is all one to her, whether it is Naples or Klin. She would only be in my way. I should be dependent upon her. I can fancy how, like a regular woman, she will lock the money up as soon as she gets it.... She will hide it from me.... She will look after her relations and grudge me every farthing."

Ivan Dmitritch thought of her relations. All those wretched brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles would come crawling about as soon as they heard of the winning ticket, would begin whining like beggars, and fawning upon them with oily, hypocritical smiles. Wretched, detestable people! If they were given anything, they would ask for more; while if they were refused, they would swear at them, slander them, and wish them every kind of misfortune.

Ivan Dmitritch remembered his own relations, and their faces, at which he had looked impartially in the past, struck him now as repulsive and hateful.

"They are such reptiles!" he thought.

And his wife's face, too, struck him as repulsive and hateful. Anger surged up in his heart against her, and he thought malignantly:

"She knows nothing about money, and so she is stingy. If she won it she would give me a hundred roubles, and put the rest away under lock and key."

And he looked at his wife, not with a smile now, but with hatred. She glanced at him too, and also with hatred and anger. She had her own daydreams, her own plans, her own reflections; she understood perfectly well what her husband's dreams were. She knew who would be the first to try and grab her winnings.

"It's very nice making daydreams at other people's expense!" is what her eyes expressed. "No, don't you dare!"

Her husband understood her look; hatred began stirring again in his breast, and in order to annoy his wife he glanced quickly, to spite her at the fourth page on the newspaper and read out triumphantly:

"Series 9,499, number 46! Not 26!"

Hatred and hope both disappeared at once, and it began immediately to seem to Ivan Dmitritch and his wife that their rooms were dark and small and low-pitched, that the supper they had been eating was not doing them good, but lying heavy on their stomachs, that the evenings were long and wearisome....

"What the devil's the meaning of it?" said Ivan Dmitritch, beginning to be ill-humoured. "Wherever one steps there are bits of paper under one's feet, crumbs, husks. The rooms are never swept! One is simply forced to go out. Damnation take my soul entirely! I shall go and hang myself on the first aspen-tree!"

10: A Warning to the Curious

M. R. James

1862-1936

The London Mercury, Aug 1925

THE PLACE on the east coast which the reader is asked to consider is Seaburgh. It is not very different now from what I remember it to have been when I was a child. Marshes intersected by dykes to the south, recalling the early chapters of Great Expectations; flat fields to the north, merging into heath; heath, fir woods, and, above all, gorse, inland. A long sea-front and a street: behind that a spacious church of flint, with a broad, solid western tower and a peal of six bells. How well I remember their sound on a hot Sunday in August, as our party went slowly up the white, dusty slope of road towards them, for the church stands at the top of a short, steep incline. They rang with a flat clacking sort of sound on those hot days, but when the air was softer they were mellower too. The railway ran down to its little terminus farther along the same road. There was a gay white windmill just before you came to the station, and another down near the shingle at the south end of the town, and yet others on higher ground to the north. There were cottages of bright red brick with slate roofs ... but why do I encumber you with these commonplace details? The fact is that they come crowding to the point of the pencil when it begins to write of Seaburgh. I should like to be sure that I had allowed the right ones to get on to the paper. But I forgot. I have not quite done with the word-painting business yet.

Walk away from the sea and the town, pass the station, and turn up the road on the right. It is a sandy road, parallel with the railway, and if you follow it, it climbs to somewhat higher ground. On your left (you are now going northward) is heath, on your right (the side towards the sea) is a belt of old firs, wind-beaten, thick at the top, with the slope that old seaside trees have; seen on the skyline from the train they would tell you in an instant, if you did not know it, that you were approaching a windy coast. Well, at the top of my little hill, a line of these firs strikes out and runs towards the sea, for there is a ridge that goes that way; and the ridge ends in a rather well-defined mound commanding the level fields of rough grass, and a little knot of fir trees crowns it. And here you may sit on a hot spring day, very well content to look at blue sea, white windmills, red cottages, bright green grass, church tower, and distant martello tower on the south.

As I have said, I began to know Seaburgh as a child; but a gap of a good many years separates my early knowledge from that which is more recent. Still it keeps its place in my affections, and any tales of it that I pick up have an interest for me. One such tale is this: it came to me in a place very remote from

Seaburgh, and quite accidentally, from a man whom I had been able to oblige— enough in his opinion to justify his making me his confidant to this extent.

I KNOW all that country more or less (he said). I used to go to Seaburgh pretty regularly for golf in the spring. I generally put up at the "Bear," with a friend— Henry Long it was, you knew him perhaps— ("Slightly," I said) and we used to take a sitting-room and be very happy there. Since he died I haven't cared to go there. And I don't know that I should anyhow after the particular thing that happened on our last visit.

It was in April, 19—, we were there, and by some chance we were almost the only people in the hotel. So the ordinary public rooms were practically empty, and we were the more surprised when, after dinner, our sitting-room door opened, and a young man put his head in. We were aware of this young man. He was rather a rabbity anæmic subject— light hair and light eyes— but not unpleasing. So when he said: "I beg your pardon, is this a private room?" we did not growl and say: "Yes, it is," but Long said, or I did— no matter which: "Please come in." "Oh, may I?" he said, and seemed relieved. Of course it was obvious that he wanted company; and as he was a reasonable kind of person— not the sort to bestow his whole family history on you— we urged him to make himself at home. "I dare say you find the other rooms rather bleak," I said. Yes, he did: but it was really too good of us, and so on. That being got over, he made some pretence of reading a book. Long was playing Patience, I was writing. It became plain to me after a few minutes that this visitor of ours was in rather a state of fidgets or nerves, which communicated itself to me, and so I put away my writing and turned to at engaging him in talk.

After some remarks, which I forget, he became rather confidential. "You'll think it very odd of me" (this was the sort of way he began), "but the fact is I've had something of a shock." Well, I recommended a drink of some cheering kind, and we had it. The waiter coming in made an interruption (and I thought our young man seemed very jumpy when the door opened), but after a while he got back to his woes again. There was nobody he knew in the place, and he did happen to know who we both were (it turned out there was some common acquaintance in town), and really he did want a word of advice, if we didn't mind. Of course we both said: "By all means," or "Not at all," and Long put away his cards. And we settled down to hear what his difficulty was.

"It began," he said, "more than a week ago, when I bicycled over to Froston, only about five or six miles, to see the church; I'm very much interested, in architecture, and it's got one of those pretty porches with niches and shields. I took a photograph of it, and then an old man who was tidying up

in the churchyard came and asked if I'd care to look into the church. I said yes, and he produced a key and let me in. There wasn't much inside, but I told him it was a nice little church, and he kept it very clean, 'but,' I said, 'the porch is the best part of it.' We were just outside the porch then, and he said, 'Ah, yes, that is a nice porch; and do you know, sir, what's the meanin' of that coat of arms there?'

"It was the one with the three crowns, and though I'm not much of a herald, I was able to say yes, I thought it was the old arms of the kingdom of East Anglia.

" 'That's right, sir,' he said, 'and do you know the meanin' of them three crowns that's on it?'

"I said I'd no doubt it was known, but I couldn't recollect to have heard it myself.

" 'Well, then,' he said, 'for all you're a scholard, I can tell you something you don't know. Them's the three 'oly crowns what was buried in the ground near by the coast to keep the Germans from landing— ah, I can see you don't believe that. But I tell you, if it hadn't have been for one of them 'oly crowns bein' there still, them Germans would a landed here time and again, they would. Landed with their ships, and killed man, woman and child in their beds. Now then, that's the truth what I'm telling you, that is; and if you don't believe me, you ast the rector. There he comes: you ast him, I says.'

"I looked round, and there was the rector, a nice-looking old man, coming up the path; and before I could begin assuring my old man, who was getting quite excited, that I didn't disbelieve him, the rector struck in, and said: 'What's all this about, John? Good day to you, sir. Have you been looking at our little church?'

"So then there was a little talk which allowed the old man to calm down, and then the rector asked him again what was the matter.

" 'Oh,' he said, 'it warn't nothink, only I was telling this gentleman he'd ought to ast you about them 'oly crowns.'

" 'Ah, yes, to be sure,' said the rector, 'that's a very curious matter, isn't it? But I don't know whether the gentleman is interested in our old stories, eh?'

" 'Oh, he'll be interested fast enough,' says the old man, 'he'll put his confidence in what you tells him, sir; why, you known William Ager yourself, father and son too.'

"Then I put in a word to say how much I should like to hear all about it, and before many minutes I was walking up the village street with the rector, who had one or two words to say to parishioners, and then to the rectory, where he took me into his study. He had made out, on the way, that I really was capable of taking an intelligent interest in a piece of folk-lore, and not quite the

ordinary tripper. So he was very willing to talk, and it is rather surprising to me that the particular legend he told me has not made its way into print before. His account of it was this: 'There has always been a belief in these parts in the three holy crowns. The old people say they were buried in different places near the coast to keep off the Danes or the French or the Germans. And they say that one of the three was dug up a long time ago, and another has disappeared by the encroaching of the sea, and one's still left doing its work, keeping off invaders. Well, now, if you have read the ordinary guides and histories of this county, you will remember perhaps that in 1687 a crown, which was said to be the crown of Redwald, King of the East Angles, was dug up at Rendlesham, and alas! alas! melted down before it was even properly described or drawn. Well, Rendlesham isn't on the coast, but it isn't so very far inland, and it's on a very important line of access. And I believe that is the crown which the people mean when they say that one has been dug up. Then on the south you don't want me to tell you where there was a Saxon royal palace which is now under the sea, eh? Well, there was the second crown, I take it. And up beyond these two, they say, lies the third.'

" 'Do they say where it is?' of course I asked.

"He said, 'Yes, indeed, they do, but they don't tell,' and his manner did not encourage me to put the obvious question. Instead of that I waited a moment, and said: 'What did the old man mean when he said you knew William Ager, as if that had something to do with the crowns?'

"'To be sure,' he said, 'now that's another curious story. These Agers—it's a very old name in these parts, but I can't find that they were ever people of quality or big owners—these Agers say, or said, that their branch of the family were the guardians of the last crown. A certain old Nathaniel Ager was the first one I knew—I was born and brought up quite near here—and he, I believe, camped out at the place during the whole of the war of 1870. William, his son, did the same, I know, during the South African War. And young William, his son, who has only died fairly recently, took lodgings at the cottage nearest the spot, and I've no doubt hastened his end, for he was a consumptive, by exposure and night watching. And he was the last of that branch. It was a dreadful grief to him to think that he was the last, but he could do nothing, the only relations at all near to him were in the colonies. I wrote letters for him to them imploring them to come over on business very important to the family, but there has been no answer. So the last of the holy crowns, if it's there, has no guardian now.'

"That was what the rector told me, and you can fancy how interesting I found it. The only thing I could think of when I left him was how to hit upon the spot where the crown was supposed to be. I wish I'd left it alone.

"But there was a sort of fate in it, for as I bicycled back past the churchyard wall my eye caught a fairly new gravestone, and on it was the name of William Ager. Of course I got off and read it. It said 'of this parish, died at Seaburgh, 19—, aged 28.' There it was, you see. A little judicious questioning in the right place, and I should at least find the cottage nearest the spot. Only I didn't quite know what was the right place to begin my questioning at. Again there was fate: it took me to the curiosity-shop down that way— you know— and I turned over some old books, and, if you please, one was a prayer-book of 1740 odd, in a rather handsome binding— I'll just go and get it, it's in my room."

He left us in a state of some surprise, but we had hardly time to exchange any remarks when he was back, panting, and handed us the book opened at the fly-leaf, on which was, in a straggly hand:

"Nathaniel Ager is my name and England is my nation,
Seaburgh is my dwelling-place and Christ is my Salvation,
When I am dead and in my Grave, and all my bones are rotton,
I hope the Lord will think on me when I am quite forgotton."

This poem was dated 1754, and there were many more entries of Agers, Nathaniel, Frederick, William, and so on, ending with William, 19—.

"You see," he said, "anybody would call it the greatest bit of luck. I did, but I don't now. Of course I asked the shopman about William Ager, and of course he happened to remember that he lodged in a cottage in the North Field and died there. This was just chalking the road for me. I knew which the cottage must be: there is only one sizable one about there. The next thing was to scrape some sort of acquaintance with the people, and I took a walk that way at once. A dog did the business for me: he made at me so fiercely that they had to run out and beat him off, and then naturally begged my pardon, and we got into talk. I had only to bring up Ager's name, and pretend I knew, or thought I knew something of him, and then the woman said how sad it was him dying so young, and she was sure it came of him spending the night out of doors in the cold weather. Then I had to say: 'Did he go out on the sea at night?' and she said: 'Oh, no, it was on the hillock yonder with the trees on it.' And there I was.

"I know something about digging in these barrows: I've opened many of them in the down country. But that was with owner's leave, and in broad daylight and with men to help. I had to prospect very carefully here before I put a spade in: I couldn't trench across the mound, and with those old firs growing there I knew there would be awkward tree roots. Still the soil was very light and sandy and easy, and there was a rabbit hole or so that might be developed into a sort of tunnel. The going out and coming back at odd hours to the hotel was going to be the awkward part. When I made up my mind about

the way to excavate I told the people that I was called away for a night, and I spent it out there. I made my tunnel: I won't bore you with the details of how I supported it and filled it in when I'd done, but the main thing is that I got the crown."

Naturally we both broke out into exclamations of surprise and interest. I for one had long known about the finding of the crown at Rendlesham and had often lamented its fate. No one has ever seen an Anglo-Saxon crown— at least no one had. But our man gazed at us with a rueful eye. "Yes," he said, "and the worst of it is I don't know how to put it back."

"Put it back?" we cried out. "Why, my dear sir, you've made one of the most exciting finds ever heard of in this country. Of course it ought to go to the Jewel House at the Tower. What's your difficulty? If you're thinking about the owner of the land, and treasure-trove, and all that, we can certainly help you through. Nobody's going to make a fuss about technicalities in a case of this kind."

Probably more was said, but all he did was to put his face in his hands, and mutter: "I don't know how to put it back."

At last Long said: "You'll forgive me, I hope, if I seem impertinent, but are you quite sure you've got it?" I was wanting to ask much the same question myself, for of course the story did seem a lunatic's dream when one thought over it. But I hadn't quite dared to say what might hurt the poor young man's feelings. However, he took it quite calmly— really, with the calm of despair, you might say. He sat up and said: "Oh, yes, there's no doubt of that: I have it here, in my room, locked up in my bag. You can come and look at it if you like: I won't offer to bring it here."

We were not likely to let the chance slip. We went with him; his room was only a few doors off. The boots was just collecting shoes in the passage: or so we thought: afterwards we were not sure. Our visitor— his name was Paxton— was in a worse state of shivers than before, and went hurriedly into the room, and beckoned us after him, turned on the light, and shut the door carefully. Then he unlocked his kit-bag, and produced a bundle of clean pocket-handkerchiefs in which something was wrapped, laid it on the bed, and undid it. I can now say I have seen an actual Anglo-Saxon crown. It was of silver— as the Rendlesham one is always said to have been— it was set with some gems, mostly antique intaglios and cameos, and was of rather plain, almost rough workmanship. In fact, it was like those you see on the coins and in the manuscripts. I found no reason to think it was later than the ninth century. I was intensely interested, of course, and I wanted to turn it over in my hands, but Paxton prevented me. "Don't you touch it," he said, "I'll do that." And with a sigh that was, I declare to you, dreadful to hear, he took it up and turned it

about so that we could see every part of it. "Seen enough?" he said at last, and we nodded. He wrapped it up and locked it in his bag, and stood looking at us dumbly. "Come back to our room," Long said, "and tell us what the trouble is." He thanked us, and said: "Will you go first and see if— if the coast is clear?" That wasn't very intelligible, for our proceedings hadn't been, after all, very suspicious, and the hotel, as I said, was practically empty. However, we were beginning to have inklings of— we didn't know what, and anyhow nerves are infectious. So we did go, first peering out as we opened the door, and fancying (I found we both had the fancy) that a shadow, or more than a shadow—but it made no sound— passed from before us to one side as we came out into the passage. "It's all right," we whispered to Paxton— whispering seemed the proper tone—and we went, with him between us, back to our sitting-room. I was preparing, when we got there, to be ecstatic about the unique interest of what we had seen, but when I looked at Paxton I saw that would be terribly out of place, and I left it to him to begin.

"What is to be done?" was his opening. Long thought it right (as he explained to me afterwards) to be obtuse, and said: "Why not find out who the owner of the land is, and inform—" "Oh, no, no!" Paxton broke in impatiently, "I beg your pardon: you've been very kind, but don't you see it's got to go back, and I daren't be there at night, and daytime's impossible. Perhaps, though, you don't see: well, then, the truth is that I've never been alone since I touched it." I was beginning some fairly stupid comment, but Long caught my eye, and I stopped. Long said: "I think I do see, perhaps: but wouldn't it be— a relief— to tell us a little more clearly what the situation is?"

Then it all came out: Paxton looked over his shoulder and beckoned to us to come nearer to him, and began speaking in a low voice: we listened most intently, of course, and compared notes afterwards, and I wrote down our version, so I am confident I have what he told us almost word for word. He said: "It began when I was first prospecting, and put me off again and again. There was always somebody— a man— standing by one of the firs. This was in daylight, you know. He was never in front of me. I always saw him with the tail of my eye on the left or the right, and he was never there when I looked straight for him. I would lie down for quite a long time and take careful observations, and make sure there was no one, and then when I got up and began prospecting again, there he was. And he began to give me hints, besides; for wherever I put that prayer-book— short of locking it up, which I did at last— when I came back to my room it was always out on my table open at the fly-leaf where the names are, and one of my razors across it to keep it open. I'm sure he just can't open my bag, or something more would have happened. You see, he's light and weak, but all the same I daren't face him.

Well, then, when I was making the tunnel, of course it was worse, and if I hadn't been so keen I should have dropped the whole thing and run. It was like someone scraping at my back all the time: I thought for a long time it was only soil dropping on me, but as I got nearer the— the crown, it was unmistakable. And when I actually laid it bare and got my fingers into the ring of it and pulled it out, there came a sort of cry behind me—oh, I can't tell you how desolate it was! And horribly threatening too. It spoilt all my pleasure in my find—cut it off that moment. And if I hadn't been the wretched fool I am, I should have put the thing back and left it. But I didn't. The rest of the time was just awful. I had hours to get through before I could decently come back to the hotel. First I spent time filling up my tunnel and covering my tracks, and all the while he was there trying to thwart me. Sometimes, you know, you see him, and sometimes you don't, just as he pleases, I think: he's there, but he has some power over your eyes. Well, I wasn't off the spot very long before sunrise, and then I had to get to the junction for Seaburgh, and take a train back. And though it was daylight fairly soon, I don't know if that made it much better. There were always hedges, or gorse-bushes, or park fences along the road— some sort of cover, I mean— and I was never easy for a second. And then when I began to meet people going to work, they always looked behind me very strangely: it might have been that they were surprised at seeing anyone so early; but I didn't think it was only that, and I don't now: they didn't look exactly at me. And the porter at the train was like that too. And the guard held open the door after I'd got into the carriage— just as he would if there was somebody else coming, you know. Oh, you may be very sure it isn't my fancy," he said with a dull sort of laugh. Then he went on: "And even if I do get it put back, he won't forgive me: I can tell that. And I was so happy a fortnight ago." He dropped into a chair, and I believe he began to cry.

We didn't know what to say, but we felt we must come to the rescue somehow, and so— it really seemed the only thing— we said if he was so set on putting the crown back in its place, we would help him. And I must say that after what we had heard it did seem the right thing. If these horrid consequences had come on this poor man, might there not really be something in the original idea of the crown having some curious power bound up with it, to guard the coast? At least, that was my feeling, and I think it was Long's too. Our offer was very welcome to Paxton, anyhow. When could we do it? It was nearing half-past ten. Could we contrive to make a late walk plausible to the hotel people that very night? We looked out of the window: there was a brilliant full moon— the Paschal moon. Long undertook to tackle the boots and propitiate him. He was to say that we should not be much over the hour, and if we did find it so pleasant that we stopped out a bit longer we would see that

he didn't lose by sitting up. Well, we were pretty regular customers of the hotel, and did not give much trouble, and were considered by the servants to be not under the mark in the way of tips; and so the boots was propitiated, and let us out on to the sea-front, and remained, as we heard later, looking after us. Paxton had a large coat over his arm, under which was the wrapped-up crown.

So we were off on this strange errand before we had time to think how very much out of the way it was. I have told this part quite shortly on purpose, for it really does represent the haste with which we settled our plan and took action. "The shortest way is up the hill and through the churchyard," Paxton said, as we stood a moment before the hotel looking up and down the front. There was nobody about— nobody at all. Seaburgh out of the season is an early, quiet place. "We can't go along the dyke by the cottage, because of the dog," Paxton also said, when I pointed to what I thought a shorter way along the front and across two fields. The reason he gave was good enough. We went up the road to the church, and turned in at the churchyard gate. I confess to having thought that there might be some lying there who might be conscious of our business: but if it was so, they were also conscious that one who was on their side, so to say, had us under surveillance, and we saw no sign of them. But under observation we felt we were, as I have never felt it at another time. Specially was it so when we passed out of the churchyard into a narrow path with close high hedges, through which we hurried as Christian did through that Valley; and so got out into open fields. Then along hedges, though I would sooner have been in the open, where I could see if anyone was visible behind me; over a gate or two, and then a swerve to the left, taking us up on to the ridge which ended in that mound.

As we neared it, Henry Long felt, and I felt too, that there were what I can only call dim presences waiting for us, as well as a far more actual one attending us. Of Paxton's agitation all this time I can give you no adequate picture: he breathed like a hunted beast, and we could not either of us look at his face. How he would manage when we got to the very place we had not troubled to think: he had seemed so sure that that would not be difficult. Nor was it. I never saw anything like the dash with which he flung himself at a particular spot in the side of the mound, and tore at it, so that in a very few minutes the greater part of his body was out of sight. We stood holding the coat and that bundle of handkerchiefs, and looking, very fearfully, I must admit, about us. There was nothing to be seen: a line of dark firs behind us made one skyline, more trees and the church tower half a mile off on the right, cottages and a windmill on the horizon on the left, calm sea dead in front, faint barking of a dog at a cottage on a gleaming dyke between us and it: full moon

making that path we know across the sea: the eternal whisper of the Scotch firs just above us, and of the sea in front. Yet, in all this quiet, an acute, an acrid consciousness of a restrained hostility very near us, like a dog on a leash that might be let go at any moment.

Paxton pulled himself out of the hole, and stretched a hand back to us. "Give it to me," he whispered, "unwrapped." We pulled off the handkerchiefs, and he took the crown. The moonlight just fell on it as he snatched it. We had not ourselves touched that bit of metal, and I have thought since that it was just as well. In another moment Paxton was out of the hole again and busy shovelling back the soil with hands that were already bleeding. He would have none of our help, though. It was much the longest part of the job to get the place to look undisturbed: yet— I don't know how— he made a wonderful success of it. At last he was satisfied, and we turned back.

We were a couple of hundred yards from the hill when Long suddenly said to him: "I say, you've left your coat there. That won't do. See?" And I certainly did see it— the long dark overcoat lying where the tunnel had been. Paxton had not stopped, however: he only shook his head, and held up the coat on his arm. And when we joined him, he said, without any excitement, but as if nothing mattered any more: "That wasn't my coat." And, indeed, when we looked back again, that dark thing was not to be seen.

Well, we got out on to the road, and came rapidly back that way. It was well before twelve when we got in, trying to put a good face on it, and saying— Long and I— what a lovely night it was for a walk. The boots was on the look-out for us, and we made remarks like that for his edification as we entered the hotel. He gave another look up and down the sea-front before he locked the front door, and said: "You didn't meet many people about, I s'pose, sir?" "No, indeed, not a soul," I said; at which I remember Paxton looked oddly at me. "Only I thought I see someone turn up the station road after you gentlemen," said the boots. "Still, you was three together, and I don't suppose he meant mischief." I didn't know what to say; Long merely said "Good night," and we went off upstairs, promising to turn out all lights, and to go to bed in a few minutes.

Back in our room, we did our very best to make Paxton take a cheerful view. "There's the crown safe back," we said; "very likely you'd have done better not to touch it" (and he heavily assented to that), "but no real harm has been done, and we shall never give this away to anyone who would be so mad as to go near it. Besides, don't you feel better yourself? I don't mind confessing," I said, "that on the way there I was very much inclined to take your view about— well, about being followed; but going back, it wasn't at all the same thing, was it?" No, it wouldn't do: "You've nothing to trouble

yourselves about," he said, "but I'm not forgiven. I've got to pay for that miserable sacrilege still. I know what you are going to say. The Church might help. Yes, but it's the body that has to suffer. It's true I'm not feeling that he's waiting outside for me just now. But—" Then he stopped. Then he turned to thanking us, and we put him off as soon as we could. And naturally we pressed him to use our sitting-room next day, and said we should be glad to go out with him. Or did he play golf, perhaps? Yes, he did, but he didn't think he should care about that to-morrow. Well, we recommended him to get up late and sit in our room in the morning while we were playing, and we would have a walk later in the day. He was very submissive and piano about it all: ready to do just what we thought best, but clearly quite certain in his own mind that what was coming could not be averted or palliated. You'll wonder why we didn't insist on accompanying him to his home and seeing him safe into the care of brothers or someone. The fact was he had nobody. He had had a flat in town, but lately he had made up his mind to settle for a time in Sweden, and he had dismantled his flat and shipped off his belongings, and was whiling away a fortnight or three weeks before he made a start. Anyhow, we didn't see what we could do better than sleep on it— or not sleep very much, as was my case—and see what we felt like to-morrow morning.

We felt very different, Long and I, on as beautiful an April morning as you could desire; and Paxton also looked very different when we saw him at breakfast. "The first approach to a decent night I seem ever to have had," was what he said. But he was going to do as we had settled: stay in probably all the morning, and come out with us later. We went to the links; we met some other men and played with them in the morning, and had lunch there rather early, so as not to be late back. All the same, the snares of death overtook him.

Whether it could have been prevented, I don't know. I think he would have been got at somehow, do what we might. Anyhow, this is what happened.

We went straight up to our room. Paxton was there, reading quite peaceably. "Ready to come out shortly?" said Long, "say in half an hour's time?" "Certainly," he said: and I said we would change first, and perhaps have baths, and call for him in half an hour. I had my bath first, and went and lay down on my bed, and slept for about ten minutes. We came out of our rooms at the same time, and went together to the sitting-room. Paxton wasn't there—only his book. Nor was he in his room, nor in the downstair rooms. We shouted for him. A servant came out and said: "Why, I thought you gentlemen was gone out already, and so did the other gentleman. He heard you a-calling from the path there, and run out in a hurry, and I looked out of the coffee-room window, but I didn't see you. 'Owever, he run off down the beach that way."

Without a word we ran that way too— it was the opposite direction to that of last night's expedition. It wasn't quite four o'clock, and the day was fair, though not so fair as it had been, so there was really no reason, you'd say, for anxiety: with people about, surely a man couldn't come to much harm.

But something in our look as we ran out must have struck the servant, for she came out on the steps, and pointed, and said, "Yes, that's the way he went." We ran on as far as the top of the shingle bank, and there pulled up. There was a choice of ways: past the houses on the sea-front, or along the sand at the bottom of the beach, which, the tide being now out, was fairly broad. Or of course we might keep along the shingle between these two tracks and have some view of both of them; only that was heavy going. We chose the sand, for that was the loneliest, and someone might come to harm there without being seen from the public path.

Long said he saw Paxton some distance ahead, running and waving his stick, as if he wanted to signal to people who were on ahead of him. I couldn't be sure: one of these sea-mists was coming up very quickly from the south. There was someone, that's all I could say. And there were tracks on the sand as of someone running who wore shoes; and there were other tracks made before those— for the shoes sometimes trod in them and interfered with them— of someone not in shoes. Oh, of course, it's only my word you've got to take for all this: Long's dead, we'd no time or means to make sketches or take casts, and the next tide washed everything away. All we could do was to notice these marks as we hurried on. But there they were over and over again, and we had no doubt whatever that what we saw was the track of a bare foot, and one that showed more bones than flesh.

The notion of Paxton running after— after anything like this, and supposing it to be the friends he was looking for, was very dreadful to us. You can guess what we fancied: how the thing he was following might stop suddenly and turn round on him, and what sort of face it would show, half-seen at first in the mist— which all the while was getting thicker and thicker. And as I ran on wondering how the poor wretch could have been lured into mistaking that other thing for us, I remembered his saying, "He has some power over your eyes." And then I wondered what the end would be, for I had no hope now that the end could be averted, and— well, there is no need to tell all the dismal and horrid thoughts that flitted through my head as we ran on into the mist. It was uncanny, too, that the sun should still be bright in the sky and we could see nothing. We could only tell that we were now past the houses and had reached that gap there is between them and the old martello tower. When you are past the tower, you know, there is nothing but shingle for a long way— not

a house, not a human creature, just that spit of land, or rather shingle, with the river on your right and the sea on your left.

But just before that, just by the martello tower, you remember there is the old battery, close to the sea. I believe there are only a few blocks of concrete left now: the rest has all been washed away, but at this time there was a lot more, though the place was a ruin. Well, when we got there, we clambered to the top as quick as we could to take breath and look over the shingle in front if by chance the mist would let us see anything. But a moment's rest we must have. We had run a mile at least. Nothing whatever was visible ahead of us, and we were just turning by common consent to get down and run hopelessly on, when we heard what I can only call a laugh: and if you can understand what I mean by a breathless, a lungless laugh, you have it: but I don't suppose you can. It came from below, and swerved away into the mist. That was enough. We bent over the wall. Paxton was there at the bottom.

You don't need to be told that he was dead. His tracks showed that he had run along the side of the battery, had turned sharp round the corner of it, and, small doubt of it, must have dashed straight into the open arms of someone who was waiting there. His mouth was full of sand and stones, and his teeth and jaws were broken to bits. I only glanced once at his face.

At the same moment, just as we were scrambling down from the battery to get to the body, we heard a shout, and saw a man running down the bank of the martello tower. He was the caretaker stationed there, and his keen old eyes had managed to descry through the mist that something was wrong. He had seen Paxton fall, and had seen us a moment after, running up— fortunate this, for otherwise we could hardly have escaped suspicion of being concerned in the dreadful business. Had he, we asked, caught sight of anybody attacking our friend? He could not be sure.

We sent him off for help, and stayed by the dead man till they came with the stretcher. It was then that we traced out how he had come, on the narrow fringe of sand under the battery wall. The rest was shingle, and it was hopelessly impossible to tell whither the other had gone.

What were we to say at the inquest? It was a duty, we felt, not to give up, there and then, the secret of the crown, to be published in every paper. I don't know how much you would have told; but what we did agree upon was this: to say that we had only made acquaintance with Paxton the day before, and that he had told us he was under some apprehension of danger at the hands of a man called William Ager. Also that we had seen some other tracks besides Paxton's when we followed him along the beach. But of course by that time everything was gone from the sands.

No one had any knowledge, fortunately, of any William Ager living in the district. The evidence of the man at the martello tower freed us from all suspicion. All that could be done was to return a verdict of wilful murder by some person or persons unknown.

Paxton was so totally without connections that all the inquiries that were subsequently made ended in a No Thoroughfare. And I have never been at Seaburgh, or even near it, since.

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11: Motive?

Anonymous

Braidwood Dispatch and Mining Journal (NSW) 25 Aug, 1 and 8 Sep 1933

For many years this weekly newspaper ran longish anonymous short stories, usually as three-part serials, at the rate of about one a month. A story with this title, including the question mark, appeared in Hutchinson's Mystery Story Magazine, *July 1925, written by Marie Belloc Lowndes, 1868-1947. As she wrote documentary style crime stories, it is likely that it is indeed by her, but I haven't been able to confirm it. There is a novel by her entitled "Motive", no question mark, in 1938; but appears to be a totally different story, and published in USA as "Why it Happened".*

IT was a dark early December afternoon at the Old Bailey. The lights had been turned on, and in the crowded Court there was a tense feeling of excitement and suspense. Day after day, hour after hour, a densely packed crowd of beautifully dressed women of fashion, famous novelists, and other students of hu-man nature, had mingled with the dregs of humanity to listen to the slow unfolding of a murder drama, the details of which had thrilled the whole country for over three months.

And now had come the last act of the curious, and, in other ways, baffling, tragedy, for it was believed that the verdict would be given to-day. The Judge had now come close to the end of his long summing-up. He had evidently tried to be scrupulously fair to the still pretty, but now oh, how weary and terrified young woman who stood in the dock, listening to him with strained attention. But the more experienced among those in Court were well aware that so far he had summed up dead against the prisoner.

"And now," he concluded sternly and impressively, "we come to the question of motive. It is not necessary to seek for motive in cases of murder, but in this case, in addition to certain facts which have been put before you, we have only too clear a motive or reason why the prisoner should have desired to get rid of her husband, or, in other words, to become a widow.

"To go back to the beginning of this strange .and terrible story, I ask you to make a note of two dates. I need hardly remind you these dates are the third and fourth of last September..."

IT WAS a delicious early autumn morning, and though the glory of summer still lingered, there was a touch of keenness in the air.

From where Adelaide Strain was now sitting, close to the tall open French window, the shady, old fashioned garden, spreading far beyond the wide lawn which bounded that side of the red-brick Georgian house, formed what most people would have sald was a perfect setting for a romantic idyll. And the idyll was not lacking, for a tall, dark, good-looking young man was now advancing at

right angles across the velvet sward, his arm round the waist of a remar-kably pretty young woman. Their motor was waiting to take him to the station.

Eva and Jack Allan had been married seventeen months, and though they were both passionate-tempered, and sometimes had what Allan called 'rows,' Jack was still very much in love with his Eva, and the two had everything youth, health and wealth can do to make a couple happy.

But wealth, after all, is a comparative term. When Eva Allan, then Eva Bell, had been sharing, as a war-widow, her pretty flat with her friend, Addie Strain, who had been widowed just before the war, her thousand a year had gone far enough to provide her with everything that she really wanted, even though she was, as Jack Allan sometimes said, "an extravagant little puss." But since she had married a man who was partner in a business which brought him in a good three thousand a year, Eva, found it extremely difficult to make both ends meet; the more so that, like so many men of his stamp, Allan, while liking every-thing about him to be what he described as "top-hole," was remarkably thrifty and careful. He took count of every penny he spent, and he was never weary of reminding his wife of the huge income tax they had to pay, and how very careful she ought to be over the matter, for instance, of her dress.

"The Mill House, this choice riverside property," as the advertisement had put it, was both too large and too costly to run, for a couple who spent three evenings of each week in town, dancing and going to the play, either alone or with other gay young folk. But Eva had fallen in love with the place on a lovely May day, just after she and her bride groom had come back from their honeymoon.

At that time their joint income had seemed, even to prudent Jack Allan, almost unlimited, but very soon indeed, in fact at the end of the first few weeks, his darling little wife's household bills had frightened the shrewd business man, and he had been relieved when she had suggested, at first timorously, and then boldly, that her old pal, Addie Strain should come and run the house, for them.

"She won't be any trouble— you'll hardly know that she's there. And she'd do anything for a hundred and fifty pounds a year. She's lame, you know, and not very strong, and she's got her little boy to keep."

Jack had demurred strongly at so large a salary— in fact, he had declared it to be ridiculous. But quiet, competent-looking Mrs. Strain had made a suggestion which very much appealed to Eva's husband. She had proposed to come for a month on trial, it being understood that if she gave satisfaction she should, remain on at three pounds a week, this being, she said firmly, the least she would take.

During the four weeks' trial not only had the master and the mistress of the Mill House been incomparably more comfortable, but the actual solid money saved over the bills had come to the big sum of £27/18/75. Mrs. Strain had also suggested, for love as it were, two or three ways in which Jack Allan could save over the garden and the garage. Small wonder that, with his mind full of the discomforts and wicked waste of the past, he had eagerly agreed to pay his wife's clever, plain friend the salary she demanded.

And now on this beautiful third of September, she having been about a year in their service, Adelaide Strain watched her two employers, a look of half satirical contempt on her sallow, intelligent face. What fools they were in their different ways! Eva's Jack, who had such a good conceit of himself, just because, he had never been "up against" life, and whose partner did all the real work; and Jack's pretty, flighty Eva who made so poor a use of her extraordinary powers of fascination, not only over men, but over women.

There had been a time when she, Addie— to give her her usual name had adored Eva, tolling and moiling for her as no paid companion would ever have done. She had seen her through what had been really one or two quite serious affairs of the heart, saving her, on more than one occasion, from the consequences of her own folly. Addie was still, in a grudging way, fond of Eva, though she heartily disliked Eva's husband.

TO-DAY she told herself, not for the first time, that but for Jack Allan's sudden appearance on the scene, she and Eva Bell might have gone on living a very pleasant life, and one that suited them both; she earning in just a few hours work a day enough to pay the small school fees of the one thing in life she really loved, her child Gilly; and Eva, while having a "good time," proving herself a kind and even a generous friend to the woman who was so good to her.

The life she led at the Mill House was a dead-alive life for a woman of Adelaide Strain's able mind and brain. But sometimes she asked herself where she would have been now but for the hundred and fifty pounds a year which she was earning. During the war it had been easy to make good money, but now there were thousands of clever, capable, but untrained women like herself looking hopelessly for jobs. Two-thirds of her salary went straight off to the preparatory schoolmaster, who thought so highly of her little Gilly that he had said, at the end of last term, that he was sure the lad would win a really big scholarship.

Last year the Allans had allowed her to have Gilly at the Mill House for the summer holidays, and she had so arranged matters, though it had not always been easy, that the child was hardly seen by them at all.

But this year, Eva, with heightened color, had explained that Jack did not want the little boy to be her for his holidays again, and that she felt sure Addie would understand. Addie had not understood, but she had said nothing, and Gilly had been taken a paying guest by the woman dispenser of a cottage hospital hard by, who happened to be an old friend of other, happier days.

This action on Jack Allan's part had deepened Mrs. Strain's dislike of him into something like hate, the more so that she felt quite sure that what he had grudged Gilly had been the child's food. And yet, being the manner of man he was, no offer on her part to make up the money for his board would have changed his decision; in fact, it would only have offended him. Jack Allan was one of those mean-natured human beings who like to think of themselves as generous and open-handed, while being really both by training and by instinct, "near."

EVA ALLAN came dancing over the lawn. The morning sun lit up her short, fair, curly hair. She looked the embodiment of youth, as well as of joy, and that though , she was thirty-two, only a year younger than Mrs. Strain herself. But the companion housekeeper was bitterly aware that sometimes she looked almost old enough to be her friend employer's mother. She had had a sad and wearing life, providence having been over-kind to Eva the while.

"I thought he would never go— never go— never go!" she chanted merrily, so loudly that the house-parlormaid heard her, and marked the words. Eva passed through the open door and sat herself down on a high table.

"Don't look so glum, Addie!" she cried, swinging her slim, well-shaped legs as she spoke. The other woman, told herself dispassionately that, yes, Eva Allan was extraordinarily pretty. This morning she was wearing a little frock of some beige colored woollen material. The short skirt pleated, the top quite plain, but with long sleeves so cleverly fashioned that any keen eyed woman would have known that it had come from one of the three or four famous dressmakers who rule the London world of fashion.

Jack Allan, who believed the pretty dress to have been a reach-me-down, had noted how attractive his wife looked to-day. As a matter of fact the price of what Eva had called to him "my glad rag," had been thirty-five pounds with the addition of a little short coat, and it figured among the items on a very long, still unpaid bill.

"I've got a secret to tell little Ad-die!" Again Eva chanted the words, and Mrs. Strain felt queerly touched. Her friend had not spoken to her so afectionately for a long, long time.

"Who d'you think is home? Who d'you think his become a millionaire? Who still loves little Eva?"

Mrs. Strain rose to her feet.

"Not Fred Bond!" she exclaimed.

"None other, little Addie—"

Eva Allan jumped off the table, and hopped about the room on one leg like a happy child.

"If it hadn't been Sunday yesterday, and Saturday the day before and if I hadn't found it so awfully difficult to get rid of Jack even for one minute— also, if you'd been nicer to me lately, then I'd already have told you the great news ever so long ago!" She put her hands behind her back, and began to breathe rather quickly.

"I think," said Addie Strain quietly, "that you will be a very foolish woman if you link up with Fred again. Your husband's a jealous man."

"That's what makes it such fun!" said Eva gleefully.

"Have you actually seen him yet?" asked the other slowly.

Eva hesitated for a scarcely perceptible second. Then she said: "Yes, I saw him on Friday." The other remained silent, and Eva, coming close up to her, threw her arms round her friend's neck.

"Don't be cross, old thing! And please don't be hurt. But you've really no idea how horrid you've been to me lately." And then Mrs. Strain said something which honestly astonished the charming little person who was at once her dear friend and her selfish, careless employer.

"The dullness of the life I live here gets on my nerves, Eva."

Mrs. Allan looked cross. "There's no reason why your life should be dull, Addle. You're perfectly free to do anything you like. Heaven knows we're away often enough."

AT THREE in the morning the lady housekeeper woke with a start to hear the motor stopping outside the gate. Then she heard her two employers, with the careless selfishness of youth, walking through the garden talking in ordinary conversational tones. There came the turn, of the latchkey in the front door lock, and the switching on of the electric light in the hall below. Unfortunately for Addie Strain, she had left her door ajar by accident, so she could hear every sound. The couple were laughing and talking, apparently on the best of terms. She heard Jack Allan exclaim:

"Then it's settled? You'll speak to her to-morrow morning?"

And the low answer: "I will it you insist on it, Jack. But I think we shall be making a mistake."

"Indeed we shan't. If you can leave off being the juggins that you showed yourself to be when we first married, and if we can get the right side of"—

here Mrs. Strain missed a word— "why, we shall save— let me see— at any rate a hundred a year."

The speaker was close to his dressing-room door by now; for when they came in late like this he slept in his dressing-room, because, unlike Eva, he always slept on till eleven after a late night in town.

"Then you'll telephone to the office, darling, and explain that I can't get there till, shall I say, twelve o'clock—"

"Yes," said Eva gaily. "You can at any rate, say twelve' o'clock, dearest."

The listener heard them exchange an affectionate kiss, and the house was quiet and in darkness once more.

What an odious man Jack Allan was! What a bounder through and through, for all that he thought himself such a gentleman. She remembered the disagreeable look he had cast on her as she admitted that her little boy was in the boathouse. He hadn't dared to say anything, because he was just a little bit afraid of her; still he had made her feel that he thought she ought not to have had the child there, even for an hour after lunch. What would he have thought had he known that Gilly had been there almost within half an hour of his leaving that morning, and had shared her lunch?

As she composed herself to sleep, she told herself what a queer thing life is. There was that easy-going, kindly fellow, Fred Bond, with whom she, personally, had always got on remarkably well. He had simply adored Eva, and Eva had flirted with him and played with him as she had done with so many young men home on short leave from Flanders during those war years when she had been the most bewitching, as well as the most pathetic-looking, of war widows. And then, after the Armistice, Bond had had to go away, dead broke, and some pal had given him an introduction to an old tea-planter in Ceylon. He had managed to get out there, and now he had apparently come back, even allowing for Eva's exaggeration, a really wealthy man. If only Eva Bell had not met Jack Allan, and had not fallen in love with him, she might by now be engaged to good-natured, generous-hearted Fred Bond, and they— all four of them counting Gilly— might have been happy together for ever and a day.

IT was ten o'clock the next morning before Eva Allan came down-stairs to find her friend Addle waiting for her, an angry look on her face. Addie held out an envelope accusingly.

"You'd no business to do this, Eva!"

"Do what?" asked the other sullenly. But there came a little color into the cheeks which were still pale as the result of last night's dissipation, and of "the row" that had preceded that dissipation.

"I won't have Fred Bond sending you a letter by hand under cover to me!"

"I'm sure it's a perfectly harmless letter." Eva would have liked to find the courage to walk out of the room with her precious letter, but she did not like to do this, and as she took the piece of paper out of the envelope something fluttered down to the floor, and both women saw that it was a cheque. For a moment it lay there between the two friends. Then Eva picked it up, and as she glanced at it her, face lit up into an expression of radiant joy.

"Yes, it's quite true, Addle! Fred's given me a present— enough money to pay up everything I owe, and a bit over! Why shouldn't he? He's more money than he knows what to do with. Thousands and thousands a year— think of it!"

She laughed, a little hysterically.

"But— but did he know about yesterday?" asked the other, bewildered. "That's my business." Then she went on: "I won't make a mystery of it, old thing! I managed to write Fred a note while I was changing my dress to go up to town. Then I popped it in the letter-box just outside the gate, and he got it by the first post to-day. This is his answer. You can look at it if you like; there's nothing private about it."

"What a shame that you should be worried, darling sweetheart I'm glad you came to see me, and not to your beastly trustee. Can you come for another spin to-day? I won't go out till I've heard 'Yes' over the telephone. I'm sure that kind soul, Mrs. Strain, will give me your message. I've already told the people here that I knew her in the old days— and that's perfectly true, isn't it?"

The telephone bell tinkled through the house, and, a moment later, the parlormaid came, and, addressing Mrs. Strain, said, "A gentleman at 'The Anchor' wishes to speak to you, ma'am. I've put him through to the garden-room."

After the maid had gone Addie Strain exclaimed angrily, "I won't be used as a blind!"

The other made no answer; together they walked to the garden-room; and there Eva took up the receiver. Her whole voice altered; it became gay, almost tender.

"Addie's busy, so she wants me to give you a message. She's awfully pleased you have come home." She looked round roguishly. "Shall I give him your love?"

"No; yes— if you like."

"She sends you her love," she called out, "and doesn't know how to thank you for your letter of this morning with enclosure. She's going up to London— yes, you've guessed right— clever boy! to a bank. She can certainly have tea with you at the Piccadilly Hotel at four-thirty. It's awfully kind of you to ask her."

She hung up the receiver again.

"What's all that nonsense?" asked Addie Strain crossly.

"Never you mind, my dear. Let me see— twenty past ten now. I've loads of time to catch the quarter past eleven. You'd better tell Jack, when he comes down that I've gone to town to see my trustee, and that I'll meet him at half-past six at Waterloo."

She was leaving the room when, all at once, she turned back, her manner awkward and hesitating.

"Addie," she exclaimed, in a changed voice, "there's, something I've forgotten— something I promised Jack last night to say to you. All that's happened this morning drove it out of my head."

"Yes?" said Mrs. Strain. "What is it, Eva?"

There came a touch of color into her sallow, cheeks.

"I suppose your husband has found out that the weekly books have been higher than usual lately; well, you know the real reason, and now that be knows so much, you might tell him a little more."

"It's nothing to do with that." Eva hesitated; she looked what she felt— miserably uncomfortable. "The truth is, Addie, he thinks we are spending too much."

"So do I," said the other curtly. "Well, he wants to make what he calls some economies, and you're among his economies."

"I among the economies? I don't understand."

"He thinks I ought to take over the housekeeping. Isn't it rot? He says the new cook, if an honest woman, will be able to help me."

"Does that mean," asked Addie Strain, in a low voice, "that you're giving me notice, Eva?"

"Well, yes— I suppose it does."

For a moment she felt tempted to throw her arms around her old friend's neck and tell her how sorry and ashamed she was at the way she and Jack were treating her. Then she remembered the ungracious, censorious way in which Addie Strain had treated the Fred Bond incident this morning, and told herself that, after all, it would be a relief to lose that constant atmosphere of disapproval, especially now that she was indulging in this delightful, and yet very innocent flirtation, with her old flame.

"And when do you wish me to leave?"

"Jack would like you to go the day before the new cook comes in. He says he'll pay you a month in advance, but that he hopes, considering how hard up we are, that you won't want him to give you the money for your board for those four weeks as well."

"I see. Thank you, Eva."

"I'm awfully sorry, old thing! But, after all, you said only yesterday how dull you found your life here— and I'm sure you'll get something nice to do very soon."

Addie Strain made no answer to that remark. She waited till the other woman had left the room; then, feeling as if her legs were made of cotton wool, she sat down and put her elbows on the table. She was remembering, with a feeling of bitter indignation, the short talk she and Jack Allan had had the day he finally engaged her over a year ago. She had made it quite clear that if she stayed on and saved him and his wife not only the money, but the constant ignoble worry that was already beginning to spoil their happy life, that there must be an honorable understanding that she should be given ample notice of any change, for she had feared, then, that they might give up the Mill House for a service flat in town.

Now she was being sent away like a dishonest servant, with just her bare legal wage— and not even her legal wage.

Allan would hand her a cheque for twelve pounds in the middle of next week, while knowing perfectly well that she had a right not only to her salary for the next fortnight, and for a mouth beyond that, but the mo-ney for her full board as well.

Yet it was puerile to think of that sort of thing now, in face of the mortal calamity which was about to overtake her and her boy. She knew— she was far too clever not to know— how poor are the chances of a woman who looked so old and worn as she looked, who was. burdened, too, with a child to keep. There were thousands of women who were drawing small pensions as the result of the war, and they had utterly spoilt the market for such as she.

WAS IT an hour, two hours, three hours?— the woman who was still the Allans' housekeeper could not have told you how long, though she had not gone to sleep at all— before she heard a frightened knock at the door and Eva's voice crying out— "Addie! Addie, wake up! Jack's frightfully ill! He's got awful colic— I suppose it was that iced drink on the top of his dinner. I want you to see him, and tell me whether you think we ought to telephone for the doctor."

Addie Strain flung on her dressing-gown; she hastened into her friend's bedroom; and then, after a glance at Jack Allan's livid face, she ran down and telephoned herself for the doctor, and roused the servants. Then she went back to her room and dressed. It was she, too, who, on the advice of the doctor, when he at last realised that the unhappy man was dying, got through a call to his mother's, house, and she, again, who soothed and "managed" the unhappy, bewildered, terrified Eva through the terrible hours that followed.

Everyone who later was called as a witness, either at the inquest or at the trial, testified to Mrs. Strain's kindness and devotion. She, herself, only broke down once, and that was when she saw the agony of poor old Mrs. Allan.

It was a curious fact that, from the very first, Jack Allan's mother declared that he had been poisoned, only to be laughed at, pitifully at first, by everyone concerned. But she was right, for the post-mortem revealed the astounding fact that Allan had undoubtedly taken a huge dose of arsenic a few hours before his death; indeed, almost certainly, though not quite certainly, in the glass of shandy-gaff which he had drunk the last thing before going to bed.

A remand was, of course, asked for at the inquest, and for a week the whole country discussed what had become known as the "Mill House Mystery." Everything, so people thought, depended on the composition of that famous old brew, shandy-gaff, and it was eagerly discussed whether the arsenic had been put into one of its ingredients or the other. The fact that the cook had been then under notice was regarded by some folk as a sinister fact, providing a clue.

There was also at the Mill House a gardener's boy with whom Jack Allan had had a violent row, so the "Weed-killer Case" was hopefully recalled. In the considerable social circle to which Jack Allan and his old mother, Mrs. Douglas Allan, had belonged, it soon began to be just breathed that old Mrs. Douglas Allan hated her daughter-in-law, and that she had much regretted her darling boy's marriage to so frivolous and extravagant a woman.

Why, the very day before the tragedy, that is, on the third of September, Mr. Allan had come to his mother and shown her a bill for hundreds and hundreds of pounds, in fact nearer two than one thousand pounds, run up by his wife at Domino's, the celebrated dressmaker.

Meanwhile, the assistance of Scotland Yard had been invoked by the local police, and a quiet, grave, thoughtful-looking gentleman had come down and had long talks, first with the bewildered widow, and then with Mrs. Strain, the while that one of his myrmidons was making discreet enquiries in the village.

But, finally, just before the inquest re-opened, all doubts and discussions were set at rest by the arrest of Mrs. Eva Allan on the charge of having murdered her husband. And the story, as unfolded by the barrister representing the Crown, admitted of little doubt in the minds of all sen-sible people, for the following deadly facts were brought forward, with none to contradict them.

These facts were as follows:—

On the third of September the newly-made prisoner had gone, immediately on her husband's departure for town, to the "Anchor Inn," where there had just arrived a now immensely wealthy bachelor with whom Mrs.

Allan had had a love affair in the days of her first widowhood. With this man, Mr. Frederick Bond, she disappeared for the whole day, he driving his Rolls-Royce, though he had brought his chauffeur to the inn.

Very reluctantly Mrs. Strain, who was not only an old friend of Mrs. Allan, but also companion-housekeeper at the Mill House, was made to disclose in the witness-box the unexpected return of Jack Allan on that very same third of September, furiously angry because a large dress-maker's bill run up by his wife had been brought to his office.

Then the innkeeper's daughter, Iris Jones, looking very much ashamed of herself, as, indeed, she ought to do, admitted having put together pieces of a letter found by her in the waste paper basket used by Mr. Bond. The letter was produced by her, and was admittedly in Mrs. Allan's handwriting. In it she told Mr. Bond that she was in great distress, her husband having found out that she owed a lot of money, and having had with her what the writer described as a "frightful row."

A bank cashier was sworn, and stated that in the early afternoon of September the fourth Mrs. Allen had cashed an open cheque for three thousand pounds. There had been some little difficulty about the matter, and the manager had actually got through to Mr. Bond to make sure that it was quite all right. He said, angrily, that it was, of course, all right, and so they had given the lady notes for the amount.

And then had come the most deadly evidence of all, evidence most reluctantly given by Miss James, the dispenser at the cottage hospital. She had told how, on her way to London, Mrs. Allan had stopped at the hospital on September the fourth, and, being erroneously told that Miss James and Master Gilly Strain were making up pills in the dispensary, she had gone there to look for them. How long she had stayed in the dispensary no one could tell. It could not have been many minutes, for she had a train to catch; but, yes, she had been there quite long enough to get at the stoppered jar of arsenic which Miss James admitted with shame and distress had been left in a cupboard, with the key in the lock.

Small wonder that beautiful, extravagant and immoral Eva Allan had been committed for trial. Indeed, as more than one great legal pundit observed in the bosom of his family, it was extraordinary that the idiotic, morbid-minded public went on taking any real interest in so stupid and obvious a story of adultery and murder, as in this case there were none of those elements of real doubt and suspense which had existed, though very rarely, in other famous stories of murder, adultery, and extravagance.

MORE AND MORE tense grew the suspense in Court, as the Judge went on slowly, sadly, impressively:

"These facts that I have just recalled to your mind, gentlemen of the jury, make it, I consider, painfully clear that when we come to the question of motive, the only human being in the world who could have had the slightest motive for wishing to put an end to the life of this excellent young man, was his wife, that is, the woman with whom he had just had a most serious quarrel; who had accepted from a wealthy bachelor, whom she knew was passionately devoted to her, the huge sum of three thousand pounds with which to pay, her debts; and who, we know, had the opportunity, if she had also the will, of possessing herself of the wherewithal to commit a terrible crime which would make her again a widow, and so free to marry, should she so desire it, the rich man with whom she was most certainly indulging in a guilty intrigue."

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12: Adventures of Miss De Fontenoy
Algernon Blackwood

1869-1951
In: *Shocks*, 1935

AS AN occasional Reader for a friendly publisher, I have come across strange stories sometimes that made me wonder about the writers and whence their material had been drawn. And by "strange" I mean uncommon, odd, unusual, entirely out of the ordinary. Had the stories been lived, or merely invented?

First novels, I knew, were by a large majority autobiographical: the writers had thrown their own experiences into the third person, often brilliantly. But such novels would be rarely followed by a second, for the personal experiences had been used up, and the creative faculty that imagines new ones was not present. A good story, however, even when the treatment fails, is there, though for lack of creative imagination it may remain raw.

It was some "raw material" by a writer called Janet de Fontenoy that caught my attention one day by this quality of strangeness, making me wonder about the writer, and whence she drew the experiences she described. Badly written, poorly presented, they somehow bore the stamp of having actually happened, for signs of imaginative faculty there were none, and they were assuredly not invented. Were they autobiographical, I asked myself? How did she compose such strange adventures? They were so utterly incredible.

My curiosity was stirred. There was an atmosphere about the tales that testified to something lived. Had there been evidence of craft, I might have doubted; it was the conviction that I was reading first-hand experiences that woke my interest to know more about their author. I could not recommend the stuff for publication, but I could write a word of tentative encouragement and suggest an interview. And this I did. Miss de Fontenoy accepted my invitation to talk about her "raw material" with a Reader who had been unable to "recommend its acceptance for publication," and came to tea one afternoon in my flat.

I felt a trifle guilty, to tell the truth. Her literary talent being non-existent, I could not honestly encourage her to continue writing and the motive behind my invitation was solely curiosity. I wanted to see what she was like, to ask about the experiences I had read, to ascertain wherein exactly lay the oddness of her mind, to judge for myself, in a word, what manner of character and personality it was that could claim to have known such things direct and at first hand. Though she had adopted the device of making the adventures happen to a man, the feminine touch seemed clear. I was too experienced, I flattered myself, to be deceived by that.

That she was not one of those glib women who create a fantasy world to compensate a a life that has disappointed them, I felt equally positive. The mental and emotional fantasia many disappointed women so easily create is unmistakable, for the ego struts and preens itself always as the central figure; but of such tiresome fantasia I could detect no sign. I was, thus, inclined to accept that Miss Janet de Fontenoy had known experiences of rarest kind, had moved, indeed, in a world not realised by the majority. These, for some reason, she had set down baldly on paper. My own training and interest in experimental psychology sufficiently explains the curiosity I felt.

I THINK I expected the door to admit a small, elderly woman, with glasses, a grave face rather, a pointed chin possibly, and dressed in unfashionable attire, so that when I saw a tall, broad-shouldered young man, hefty, with clear blue eyes, stride in, I confess that it rather took my breath away. After the first surprise, however, my instinctive reaction was one of relief. I was actually relieved to find that Janet de Fontenoy was a healthy looking, upstanding young male. Was there disappointment too? I think so, though it had nothing to do with the sex of my visitor, but rather with his appearance. Fancy had played, no doubt, with a picture of someone who would suggest the mysterious, even the uncanny: there would be a hint of a queer mind, an interestingly unbalanced personality, behind dreamy eyes that saw beyond the common things of life, an atmosphere of the ghostly, even the other-worldly. Whereas this fellow was an athlete surely, a football forward, a diamond sculler, or on his way to the centre court at Wimbledon. There was nothing mysterious in the figure towering above the armchair with cushions I had placed for an elderly lady.

His mind seemed as straightforward as his physical appearance.

"I must apologise for pretending to be a woman," he began at once in a good deep voice. "I ought to have told you, I'm afraid. But"— he hesitated a fraction of a second, smiling like a shy boy rather— "I knew you'd not be so interested to see a man. And I wanted to come. I hope you will forgive me."

A shade disturbed by his penetration, I smiled inwardly over my faulty judgement, and assured him there was nothing to forgive and made him sit down.

"I'm not literary either," he went on, "as you already know. I've got the mathematical mind, I believe. At least, figures are my best point. My father's an actuary, and I'm in his office."

He was direct as a poker. The little armchair, intended for a frail lady, creaked ominously as he sat down. I poured out the tea, feeling a tankard of ale or a whisky-and-soda might have been more suitable.

"Your— your work interested me," I told him, choosing the noun wrongly, for while it was not literary, it equally was not work. The writing was done surely of necessity, I knew, functional as eating, and eating is not work. "I rather wondered, you see," I stammered, "what made you try to write these experiences."

I met his directness, that is, with similar directness.

He laughed. "Try is the right word," he replied. "But I'll tell you why. I wanted to get it out of my mind on to paper. I'd have preferred to build a model, but that was impossible of course. So I chose words— as plain and true as I could make them."

"You found expression of some kind a relief—" I suggested.

"I suppose so, yes," he said slowly. He reflected a moment. "The fact is," he went on, "I think I wanted to find a formula— an hypothesis that would cover my experiences. Writing it all out in words and sentences, setting it down in another medium, I thought, might clear my mind a bit. Besides, I wanted— I—"

I encouraged him with a nod and an understanding smile, and waited. To my amazement, a slight flush came to his brown cheeks.

"You see, I knew you would read the stuff and ask me to come," he finished, face, voice and eyes as honest as those of a schoolboy.

"Ah! You knew that," I repeated. "Knew it in advance, you mean?"

He looked straight at me, nodding his head in turn.

"I knew you'd believe them, too," he added.

"Believe the experiences— believe they really happened?"

"That's it, yes."

"You deliberately picked *me* out, then?" I asked, showing no hint of scepticism, because I felt none. "You knew my mind, my attitude?"

"Yes— up to a point, that is. I knew your mind was open, without preconceptions. You had no prejudices, I mean, against such things happening." He took his second piece of cake, having scorned mere bread and butter and the hot trifles I had expected to see a spectacled lady nibble daintily.

I watched him with increasing interest, not sorry to find the direction of the talk could be left to him, and I was aware already that my mind had decided of its own accord neither to argue or deny. I found myself accepting at face value, so to speak, whatever he might tell me. The Adventures I had read in MS. rose before me vividly, forming a background to his straightforward, almost boyish personality, producing perhaps a sense of incongruity somewhere, yet nowhere of doubt. It was not easy, I mean, to reconcile "other-worldly" experiences with this stalwart, hefty fellow eating his cake with zest and with an appetite as honest as his eyes and manner. Nothing dreamy or uncertain

emanated from this very fit young man— twenty-eight to thirty years I gave him at most— whose fitness reminded me of newspaper advertisements of Grecian youths who wear "health-giving" underwear, or eat some divine patent food. Nothing fanciful lay in him, no hint of the charlatan, no touch of mystery. Desire for notoriety, as the hero of unusual adventures— a common motive of inferiority-complexes that can achieve peculiarity in no other way— was certainly absent. If this fellow claimed that he had lived unordinary things, he had lived them.

Thus, when he asserted quietly that he knew my mind in advance of meeting me, I found myself disposed to take it as true. The word "incredible" did not again offer itself. What did offer itself, oddly enough, was the idea that his appearance and his adventures were not so entirely irreconciliable after all. This idea rose in me suddenly: that his appearance and personality, so obviously genuine, were an epitome of what he claimed, a simile rather. Behind this "obvious reality" I gazed at, a deeper reality lay concealed. Life, nature, the universe, are but a fractional, imperfect representation of an actual reality behind we never know. Their "obvious reality" is false. Similarly, behind this Janet de Fontenoy crouched another, more real being.

I remember this notion shooting across me, as I watched him enjoying his cake. While my mind, untouched by criticism, held his astonishing claim that he had known me in advance of meeting, a judgement formed itself as well. So swift are intuitive processes, that it rose, like Minerva from the head of Jove, complete in a second. Here, I felt, was a nature at one with itself, made of a single piece, homogeneous, uninjured by any grit, mental or emotional, that crept in to disturb rhythm. His machinery ran smoothly as a complete whole, its simplicity unmarred by any extraneous influence that might cause wavering. Such human beings, I knew, were of necessity extremely rare. To have reached his age intact would, indeed, constitute him almost a freak.

The poison of thought alone, of sex, if of no other activity, destroys this unique quality early. His mind, he had mentioned, was mathematical. Was he, then, acquainted with symbols only? My own thought, at any rate, made this sudden jump in speculation.

That he had gauged my own, at least, was certainly true. He had deliberately picked me out as a Reader of his MS. in advance. He had known that I should invite him to call, that I expected a woman, that I should be interested, and more, that I should believe. And his claim to have foreseen this scrap of the Future I indeed found myself accepting at its face value. No hostile criticism, such as normally must have been the case, stirred in me.

Having finished his cake and set down empty his third cup of tea, he declined a cigarette, asking if he might smoke his pipe.

"'You've had no direct experiences of your own," he remarked, as a statement rather than a question. "If you had, you would be more than open-minded only— you'd be convinced. Wouldn't you?"

I raised my eyebrows merely, for this further evidence of penetration, of accurate knowledge rather, was again disturbing. But I made no comment. I wanted him to talk first, my own questions could come later, though I already began to have the feeling that these would be answered before I had even stated them. Did I feel that my thoughts were open to him? Hardly that perhaps. It was rather that his power of anticipation was extraordinary. Such trivial evidence of thought-transference, in any case, I reflected, was common enough between minds in sympathy. "You took that out of my very head, I was just going to say it," is a commonplace, of course. And the sympathy between us was indeed definitely there, for while the visit, the precedents leading up to it, were of a kind to produce a certain tension, if quite easy tension, this was not present. We might have known one another for years. There was a sincerity and naturalness about him that made me think of trees: I might have been sitting in a calm, deep beech wood, communing with nature on a windless day. This sort of peace and reality he brought with him. No disturbance of any kind broke a certain stillness he produced. The simile of a deep wood on a windless day returned— no single leaf was ruffled. Yet my mind was actually seething with questions I meant to ask— about himself, about the experiences I had read, about how, why and whence they came to him, how they affected his being, his reactions to such strange occurrences in his ordinary life, and what, indeed, his "ordinary life" consisted of. My curiosity, my questions, however, somehow did not qualify what I call this stillness. It remained undisturbed between us.

One must pay attention to his actual words. Each phrase held so much.

"I've had them, at intervals, since childhood," he remarked. "At intervals, of course. They are more real than my ordinary life. Though they come as interruptions in my ordinary life, it's my ordinary life that seems the interruption. As though daily life was 'being asleep,' and I wake up suddenly. An Experience is when I'm awake. When it's over, I fall asleep again— into ordinary life."

I did not wish to check him. I merely slipped in a a quick question by the way about his sense of time. Did time, during an Experience, seem the same as time in ordinary life? Was the sense of duration similar in both? He smiled with pleasure.

"Of course, you ask that," he said, "because you know already. Years are very short periods that only seem long. The Experiences last longer, ever so much longer, but in quite another way." I left it at that, watching him pressing

his pipe down, with an air of having said all that was necessary. "Nothing in my parents explains anything," he went on quietly between puffs. "My mother, a Russian now dead, was emotionally religious; my father lives only for his work and is rich. I get my turn for figures from him. I could always add several columns at a glance, and extract cube-roots, like the prodigies, at sight. That's what I meant by having a mathematical mind— only figures really. The reasoning that belongs to mathematics I don't possess. I have no reasoning power at all— none. No sex either. Sex has never developed in me. I see nothing that even begins to waken it—"

I interrupted, for he was going too fast— in the sense that I should never remember all the mental notes I was making for questions later; for, let me repeat— one should pay attention to his actual words.

"An ascetic, are you then? A virgin— still?"

He smiled, his eyes bright with a laughter that was more of surprise than shyness.

"Continent— oh, yes— always," he answered. He seemed to reflect a moment, as though perhaps trying to find the exact words he wanted. I, too, reflected— as swiftly and intelligently as his pregnant speech permitted. Sexual energy, the basis of all energy, primarily intended for the occasional procreation of children, had long since deteriorated into a mere physical enjoyment of frequent recurrence. The waste of valuable energy to the individual, to the race, to humanity as a whole, was incalculable.

"The energy goes somewhere else," he went on, as though picking up my own fleeting thought. "Goes in another direction, of course. It all gets used— I know that much. It leaves nothing over for w— for love-making," he quickly changed the word, and though there was no hint of contempt in his voice, there was a rather nameless quality I thought of as— not pity precisely, so much as pitying.

"Could you express that in your formula?"

He shook his head. "I've never got as far as a proper formula," he answered.

I used the laconic shorthand he evidently preferred, though what he had just said provided a text I could have commented upon with deep interest and at great length. Above all, I felt, argument must be avoided. He surely was telling me, rather casually, things he knew, and argument could only bewilder him. It was his simple direct utterance I wanted, the rest must wait. My visitor, of whom I knew little enough indeed, should be accepted on his own terms. My questions, I decided, must be few, but fundamental. I wished, that is, to establish one or two general principles in my own mind before going into

detail. The conviction that I had come across something of rarest interest and value meanwhile deepened. I was aware of uncommon thrill.

"Naturally," I commented. "I understand. And wisdom needs no formula."

I gazed into his blue eyes through the tobacco smoke, and he returned my gaze as steadily. It was, I believe, my own eyes that fell first. Not that there was the faintest suggestion of any so-called hypnotic nonsense about his state, but that there was, for all that, some quality I found stimulating to the point of being disconcerting, since I hold "disturbing" to be too strong a word. Yet only remotely so, and perhaps the *mot juste* after all would be inspiring. It was as though, deep down in me and far out of sight, an odd quiver tried to rise, an eager quiver of intense excitement. His eyes, if extremely direct, did not look through me; it was not that; nor did they, so to speak, see something behind me. That they seemed more aware, more conscious, gazed into a more extended, perhaps a different field, than the one I knew, expresses it best. The phrase "worlds not realised" flashed across my mind as my eyes fell from his, and the thrill I have already mentioned included in that moment a further reaction still, so that I felt spidery legs running up and down my spine, and I acknowledged the shiver we call goose-flesh.

Instantly, again, I had myself in hand, strap-hanging, as it were, to a sensible question:

"Your Experiences cannot be induced, I suspect?" I asked, though my exact meaning, it was clear, escaped him. For he had no reply at first.

"Induced?" he repeated, in his steady voice.

"Can you bring them on at will," I explained, "or when you want them?"

He shook his head decisively. "Oh no," he said, "I can't do that."

"So you haven't trained yourself in any special way, I take it? Training of attention or will, for instance? Concentration, breathing, breath-control— what the East calls Yoga?"

He stared for a moment, wondering evidently what I was talking about. "I am ignorant, I'm afraid," he replied, "for I don't know what all this is. They come, or they don't come. Out of the blue they come—"

"Without warning?"

That made him laugh again, a jolly laugh it was, too.

"No bell rings exactly," he said, "but I'm given notice, if you like. There are warning signs as you might call it, a sort of warning thrill. Something rushes over me— *all* over, I mean."

"And what starts the thrill?"

"Well— colour or sound usually, I think, music— outline, too, sometimes." He broke off, hesitating a little. "A combination, it seems."

"Beauty?" I ventured.

He nodded at once. "Beauty, yes, that's it. Loveliness. I get a shock, you see, first."

If he talked rather as a schoolboy talks, that was what I preferred and welcomed.

"That, too," I suggested, "refused to come into your formula?"

He chuckled, the shy expression passing across his face again. "I used the word formula before without know! exactly what it means," he confessed. "Anyhow, I don't know properly the combination of colour and sound and emotion that bring on an Experience. They are usually the first sign of the change coming— that's all I can say."

I gave an understanding nod, as it were, yet not daring to pretend in any slightest degree, for he would see through any camouflage, I felt positive, and I should lose his confidence. Beauty, I mentioned, was well known to heighten and intensify consciousness with sensitive people, producing an exaltation of the faculties. "And this 'combination ' you speak of," I asked, "is loveliness of one kind or another that makes you feel deeply first?"

"That's it," he agreed promptly. "The kind that really hurts— you know— gives you a stab, a wound."

"What you called a shock just now, yes; and the shock shifts your whole being, so that your consciousness finds a way open suddenly— well, elsewhere?"

His face lit up with pleasure. "Splendid!" he exclaimed, almost as though he cried "Well hit, sir!" at cricket. "I knew, of course, that you would talk to me just like this. It's what I came for really."

To gain time, perhaps to cover a momentary confusion, I lit a cigarette. My own mind, I felt, had been rushing far ahead of my strange visitor's, while yet the feeling grew upon me that his own was actually in advance. What I had thought out and reasoned, I mean, he seemed to know as naturally as a child plays with a ball. Speculations I had wildly indulged for years seemed to meet corroboration halfway in his Experiences. Dreams and visions my subconscious had beckoned from the stars came almost to earth as I watched and listened. My critical faculties, however, were not dulled entirely, for as I lit my cigarette and saw its blue smoke rise, I found myself questioning that "shock" that beauty gives— to the young, at any rate. Children, I remembered, are not susceptible to loveliness, they are not aware of beauty, they do not perceive it. At what age, I wondered, had his Experiences begun to show themselves?

"I am intensely interested," I said, after this slight pause. "But tell me— if you can remember— were you consciously aware of recognising beauty, loveliness, as a child? Did these shocks come to you as a youngster, for instance?"

For the first time he seemed to stammer.

"I— I" he began, then stopped. Yet it was not stammering, nor was it, properly speaking, hesitation even. "As a child," he went on, presently, "in early youth— I did, yes, get these shocks," emphasising the pronoun peculiarly, "but— not I," repeating the personal pronoun with no emphasis at all.

His meaning came to me, though not instantly.

"Another 'I'— a different 'you,' of course?"

He merely nodded. It was as obvious to him as the sugared cake on the table beneath his nose.

"It's a longish time ago, you see," he observed quietly. "I was little more than a boy when the first thing happened— about seventeen— and I'm over forty-five now."

Why, I caught myself wondering, did this statement, this astonishing statement, hardly even startle me? Why did I not feel bewildered, puzzled? I ought by rights to have known a reaction of amazement, incredulity, laughter, of sceptical disbelief at any rate. Some exclamation of blank surprise, of utter doubt, should have found spontaneous expression: "Over forty-five! What d'you mean? You're not even thirty yet!" Instead of which, his statement, offered so quietly and naturally, dropped into the pool of my mind as a thin stone slips into water with scarcely a ripple. Not a leaf stirred— to use the simile of the wood again. *I* was the one who acknowledged to over the half-century mark, and I was talking with a youth, a young man, who yet claimed to be nearly my own age as naturally as though he said: "Yes, I'd like a cigarette," or "I feel hungry, too."

It was this absence of the normal reaction in myself that then simultaneously flashed an explanation that was similar, rather, to his stammering choice between "*I*" and "I" a moment ago. It is less easy, perhaps, to set down this hint of explanation, but the essence of it lay in time. His Experiences took place in other, in different, time. In *that* he was indeed "over forty," a hundred, a thousand. His statement was made out of a different time-scale. I now caught myself acknowledging that I had already been aware of age in him, of something old, old, of something ageless rather, even while I sat there chatting with a lad who wore the full bloom of youth. It had lain unrecognised in me hitherto. I searched his face, his physical appearance, keenly for signs that nearly half a century should have traced; and as I did so there again stole over me that sensation as of little feathers that brushed my skin along the spine, stirred by a breath of cooler air, the touch of the unearthly….

"Yes, of course," I found myself saying quietly after a certain pause, and as much pursuing a thought of my own as addressing him directly, "the careless

waste of sexual energy ages us, no doubt, yet it's not the question of storing it up alone, but the way— the direction— in which to use it afterwards that is important."

"Is that it?" he replied. "I had never put it into words."

While he refilled and lit another pipe, and while my own thoughts went diving and soaring a little wildly perhaps, I got the impression that his own mind lay quite inactive, uncharged with thoughts of any kind. It came to me that he really did not think at all. He waited, anyhow, for me to speak. And this time I made a plunge for it:

"And life, as we find it and know it," I asked, following my own line of ideas somewhat at a venture again, "does life interest you— are you thrilled, I mean, or bored with it? Do you enjoy being alive? Does it seem to you worth while, for instance, or the reverse?"

It was, of course, a fundamental question. His relations to living involved a keynote theme. I wanted to know his main reaction to finding himself upon the planet, conditioned in time and space with a given order of faculties and senses, as human beings are. Had he an object in being alive? Was he ambitious? Was life of value, of importance, to him? Did it seem to him merely a rather futile dream, or filled with meaning?

The question demanded a reply. He gazed into my eyes. Why did I attach such importance to what he might say? I hardly knew. Had I already persuaded myself that this strange and rather casual visitor experienced— occasionally, at any rate— a different kind of life?

"It's wonderful— isn't it— merely to be alive," I added, helping him to a reply, "even if the meaning is not clear."

His eyes withdrew to the lighting of his pipe, then returned calmly to my face again, and I cannot explain why his quiet, steady gaze increased that faint tickling down my spine.

"Yes," he answered, "I do enjoy it." He hesitated. "Knowing there's a way out makes all the difference, though— doesn't it?"

I had expected his reply to be of this kind; he knew, moreover, that I had expected it. A smile began, then vanished; but behind the great sunburnt bulk of him I saw another thing steal up, something I can only describe as light and fiery, and of amazing swiftness. It was gone even as I stared.

"Your Experiences you mean, point to a way out?"

He nodded.

"A way of escape— from what would otherwise be— intolerable?"

He nodded again, giving the slightest possible shrug of the shoulders.

"From what's almost a mechanical state— a state where we just respond automatically to external stimuli of various kinds??" I insisted. "Like machines, rather— automata merely?"

A puzzled expression crossed his face. We laughed a little.

"They're real, you see. I'm awake then. Wide awake," he put in.

"Ordinary life seems something of the dream-order by comparison you mean? Semi-conscious almost?"

He nodded again, shrugging his big shoulders, and it was as though he said: "I suppose so." Evidently, he had never thought of putting it into words before. He gave a kind of long-drawn sigh. "There's a way out anyhow," he said, "and once we know that, we can manage to stick the rest— to enjoy it even."

He puffed his pipe, at any rate, as though he enjoyed *that*. His manner was as quiet and easy as if we had been discussing cricket averages, or styles at tennis. A pause fell between us, lasting probably longer than I realised, for I was rather intensely occupied with my own thoughts, and these thoughts dived in headlong fashion into somewhat deep recesses of my own field of psychological research. It was after a considerable interval that I heard my own voice again, but as if speaking to myself rather than to him, so that I hardly expected an answer. I was not even certain that I had spoken out loud. His comment startled me, therefore, all the more.

"Shall we ever get any further?" I was thinking. "Will our knowledge ever really advance? Shall we ever know more about essential things…." And, apparently, I spoke aloud.

"Not by any method we're using at present," came the startling comment. "We shall go round and round in the same old circle as for thousands of years. Humanity as a whole, I mean. Not individuals, of course."

Was it telepathy again, or had I uttered actually? In any case, it did not matter; he had taken my own thought whole: that nothing *real* could ever be known by intellect or reason. It was the wrong instrument.

"We possess no faculty, as we are now, for knowing anything real. That's what you mean?"

He nodded, pressing the tobacco down into his pipe with one finger. "It's useless *that* way," he remarked, as though he criticised a man's service at tennis in relation to his improvement. "It's only adding the same kind of knowledge to the same kind of knowledge."

He lit a match and puffed vigorously for a moment. "To know more," he repeated between puffs, "we— we ourselves— must change."

And on this our conversation abruptly came to an end; it stopped, as though a climax had been reached beyond which nothing useful could then be said. Perhaps that was true, I found myself reflecting, as I saw him rise from his

chair and knock the ashes from his pipe which had refused to light again properly. He replaced it in his pocket, his clear blue eyes gazing down at me. I sat gazing up at him a moment, after the most astonishing talk of my life. That this well set-up young fellow was nearly as old as myself seemed, of course, quite incredible. The conversation just ended was, of course, even more incredible. Cryptic, almost like some shorthand known only to the two of us, it must have sounded unintelligible to any third party who had heard it. For I had spoken as though communing with myself, uttering the final results of many years' difficult experiment and thought, but omitting all process of argument by which these results had been reached. And yet he had not only completely understood me, but had confirmed, even added to, my deep convictions. He had taught me something too.

Something in me felt breathless. Something had emanated from him all this time that almost literally took my breath away.

"You'll jot down notes about your further adventures," I remarked, walking beside him to the door, "and let me see them?"

"I'll come and tell them to you, please," he answered. "We may hit on the formula together then. You have the time."

So he knew that too. It was true that I only "read" queer, out of the way, even outlandish MSS. for my friend, the publisher, "reading" them for my own interest without a fee.

I put no unnecessary questions to him, least of all how it was he knew so much about my mind and habits. That my hobby combined research and experiment along psychological and physiological lines was obviously no secret to him. But one question I did ask, as we reached the door into the street.

"Your name— you might as well tell me," I suggested. "Your address, of course, I have."

"Smith-Jones," he replied at once. "John." And I watched him go striding away down the street with the quiet energy and ease that belong to youth alone. He had left his MS. in my room, but purposely of course.

I

The Experiences assuredly, I reflected, were by no means all of them significant, in the sense that they added anything to life either by way of happiness, knowledge, or human faculty. Some, indeed, were little better than ghost tales, if of rather unordinary kind.

There was, thus, the matter of the mackintosh, or properly speaking, of the mackintosh and hat, an experience capable of more than one fairly obvious explanation that will occur to all, while yet, I hold, of not entirely satisfactory kind. The obvious explanations, that is, explain away better than they explain.

The account of what happened is simple enough; in the version John Smith-Jones set down on paper most would call it banal, trivial, dull. Its schoolboy English, however, could not quite conceal another quality that somehow crept past the style, the errors of punctuation, even the faulty grammar. It was this quality that caught my attention, surviving all the weaknesses of composition. Was I right concerning this "quality," I asked myself? Did I not perhaps supply it myself, imagine it?

It only to satisfy myself that it was, or was not, my own contribution, I persuaded him, oh, easily enough, one day to repeat it verbally to me. The written account lay clearly in my memory as I listened. The "quality" not only survived, but became intensified.

It was one of the earlier experiences, John somewhere about eighteen years of age, his nose well on the grindstone of his father's actuarial business, involving office work which began at the comfortable hour of ten every morning. His father, preferring his semi-country little house in Richmond, did not sleep in town, and John had a room in his aunt's apartment near the Marylebone Road in Devonshire Terrace. Breakfast, dinner and bed he found thus with his father's unmarried sister, whose alert nowhere intrudes into what happened beyond the fact that one late October she went to Paris, taking her maid with her, and providing an opportunity for the cook, an old family servant, to take a holiday at the same time. John, thus, was left alone in the apartment, with room and breakfast attended to by the porter's wife. He rather enjoyed it; to dine in a restaurant for a change appealed to him as well, the sense of privacy, as though he owned the flat, amused him; he was the only person with a latchkey.

It afforded him pleasure, he mentioned, to find the place empty and unoccupied on getting home in the evening, or at night after dining on the way, if work had kept him late. And it was the word "unoccupied" rather than "empty" that he stressed. His account contented itself with this slight emphasis, in passing as it were, but drew no deduction from the little point. On my pressing him for a word of further explanation, he merely shrugged his shoulders. I put my question because here, it struck me, was a specific instance where the "quality" I have already mentioned stole out of the loose end his written version had failed to gather up later. "Oh," he replied, "there was a continual sort of coming and going in the place. No, not of any disturbing kind— I mean, nothing that concerned me personally— merely that I was aware of it"— which was all that I could squeeze out of him, and for the simple reason that it was all that he could tell me. The rooms were, thus, unoccupied, yet, in some sense or other undefined and indefinable, did not seem entirely empty.

Is it a distinction without a difference? I think not. The aunt, only referred to in this single regard, was a kindly egocentric, whose voluble personality filled every corner and cranny she had left behind her. She was of the type that could talk about herself to a visitor for an hour without stopping, nor talk uninterestingly perhaps, yet add when saying goodbye: "but you've told me nothing about yourself! How are *you* getting on?" with an interest wholly sincere. In my own mind I ascribed John's "coming and going" to what may be called "atmospherics" left behind her.

To this unoccupied suite, at any rate, he returned one afternoon towards the end of October, made himself a cup of tea with the things left out by the porter's wife, read for an hour, dozed for another hour, and then felt it was time to go out and get his dinner. The weather was raw and squally; he chose a restaurant at hand; he chose also a rather worn grey felt hat and carried a macintosh over his shoulder, and the macintosh was both new and of a very light fawn colour, so light, indeed, that he remembered hesitating when he bought it, with the thought that a darker shade would wear better by not betraying the London grime so easily. And now, as he left the restaurant soon afterwards, the rain was coming down with a steadiness that prophesied a stormy autumn night, with gusts of angry wind and a raw touch of cold. A miserable, gloomy night, it was. He walked the few hundred yards, but was glad to reach the shelter of the building, shaking himself in the vestibule like a wet dog. The porter took him up in the lift and wished him good-night. He let himself in with his latchkey, flung his wet macintosh and grey felt hat upon the ottoman in the corridor just outside his door, and made himself comfortable with a book in the deep armchair of his small sitting-room.

It was perhaps about ten o'clock, the gusty rain driving against the windows. But the rain and wind, shouting the end of summer dismally enough, could not trouble him, for his chair was comfortable, his voluble aunt was far away, the next day, being Sunday, allowed of breakfast in bed, and his book, *Arabia Deserta*, enchanted, even indeed, enthralled him.

In this pleasant receptive state, his thoughts a vivid picture of the coloured scenes he was reading about, John paid little attention to autumn's gusty violence, nor noted particularly the passage of time, for the idea of breakfast at any hour he happened to wake next morning rather broke time's usual tyranny. It was thus a sound in the street that first disturbed his easy enjoyment of Arabian deserts— the music of someone playing upon a fiddle that drew his attention, by slow stages, from his vicarious travels to things closer at hand. He had recognised Tchaikovsky's *Andante* even before he named it to himself, but having once named it his thoughts had then been deflected outwards.

Laying the book down upon his knee, he listened, and the exquisite and poignant melody, sighing out its soul upon the dismal street at night, plunged deeply into him. Its gracious melancholy stirred him profoundly. He imagined the homeless player, homeless and hopeless too, for who would be passing ready to give alms at such an hour in the darkness?— he saw the poor instrument, damaged to ruin by the streaming rain, he felt the soaked clothes and soggy boots … and opening his window he called out loudly above the wind, while he threw down half-a-crown wrapped up in a sheet of old newspaper.

The wind blew both voice and newspaper at an angle, but he saw a shadow crawl out of other shadows, pick it up, and retreat into the night … and when he was back in his chair again, the enchanting book ready to be resumed, he discovered that its haunting power had evaporated, something different having replaced it. There was emotion in him of disturbing kind that denied the desire to read. What were precisely its ingredients? He could not say. There was pity, an aching pity; there was yearning, a homeless yearning; a bitter sense of desolate frustration, with a desire to escape, though not for himself primarily, from miseries due to some intolerable slavery. A pang of violent, unearthly nostalgia swept over him, that was accompanied by an icy realisation suddenly of the futility of life's brief span and its ludicrous limitations. All of which emotions, powerful and searching, grouped themselves about a vivid picture of that wretched shadow fiddling hopelessly in the cold rain and darkness.

A moment this swept over him, a moment merely, and it was while occupied with it that he caught another, closer sound, not in the street this time, but in the flat, in the corridor indeed just outside his door. He was aware of it, no more than that, for it did not draw his attention particularly, and he merely noticed it with enough vague interest to say to himself "Now, what was that, I wonder?" but caring nothing about the answer. He listened. A mouse, a stray cat dropping from a window ledge, a letter pushed beneath the front door or through the flap. There was, however, no conscious attention in his listening, his mood still under the sway of that haunting music, that aching yearning pity, with the mournful, homeless shadow crawling in the rainy darkness. He did listen, none the less, with a certain deliberation, and then, the sound not being repeated, he picked up his book again and went on reading. And he was half-way down the page when it came back to him sharply that no mouse or cat had made that sound. It was a footstep. This did not interrupt his reading; it was merely that another part of his mind recognised the fact while he still read— until he reached the end of the page and laid the book down abruptly because the sound had suddenly been repeated.

He listened now with close attention. A footstep had passed along the corridor immediately outside his door, a very quiet, soft, almost a stealthy, footstep. It was not audible now. It had stopped.

That he was alone in the empty flat then came over him, the front door locked, the porter gone, the lift no longer running, for it was after eleven o'clock, and that the only latchkey was in his pocket, and— that there was somebody in the corridor. This slight increase of awareness came over him. "Who can that be, I wonder?" ran a second question across his mind, yet again a question he asked himself quite casually. There was no trace of nervousness in him anywhere, as he laid his book down and got out of his armchair to have a look for himself.

"I'll just have a look round," was the way he put it to himself, as he rose in leisurely fashion and crossed the carpet.

Opening his door, he stood staring along the dark passage, turning on the electric switch the same second. There was no one there, the corridor was empty. He strode along it, looking into each room in turn with the light full on— his aunt's bedroom, the drawing-room, both draped in dust sheets, the kitchen, the bathroom too. Under the beds he looked and into the cupboards. He even went out on to the iron landing beyond the scullery where the tradesmen hoisted up the food. There was no one. Nor was there any open window through which a cat might have crept. The entire place was empty, silent, apparently unoccupied, so that he turned out the various lights and went back to his reading, feeling quite sure he was alone in the apartment. And it was then, while reading, that another part of his mind let loose an unexpected whisper:

"There was a change in that corridor, a difference in it, something you noticed, but didn't realise quite."

It was true. He now realised it. There *was* a slight alteration in the corridor, a detail missing, something that had been there when he came home from dinner had disappeared. This detail, whatever it might be, was no longer there. The same moment he was out of his chair and in the corridor again, searching keenly with his eyes and memory, and as he looked at the low divan where he had flung down his macintosh and old grey felt hat, he instantly detected what the alteration was.

The fawn-coloured macintosh lay where he had flung it, patched with wet, one sleeve hanging down, the other sprawling over a cushion. It was the grey felt hat he could not see. The hat was gone.

So there had been someone in the flat. His search had not been thorough enough. He must look again. He did so, and ended with the positive certainty that neither man nor mouse, burglar least of all, was in hiding. He closed the

door of each room in turn behind him, fastened the chain along its groove in the front door as well. He did this very thoroughly. The hunt for the missing hat was equally conscientious. It had neither slipped behind the divan, nor fallen to the floor, nor become mixed up with the macintosh. It had been lying, he remembered distinctly, on the top of the wet macintosh, for he had taken it off last and tossed it there, and, since it was now gone, somebody had taken it. Somebody, yes, but who? Had, perhaps, the front-door catch failed to work when he came in, so that a hand could slip through quietly?? Not only was the distance too great for any hand to reach, but the front-door was securely fastened, and the only available latchkey was in his pocket.

Moreover, he had definitely heard that stealthy footstep.

A moment longer he stood looking down at the macintosh, which he then folded differently so that another side of it should dry, and then he went back slowly to his sitting-room and calmly resumed the reading of his *Arabia Deserta*.

Calmly, yes. For somehow, the little incident did not disturb him particularly, did not really puzzle him unduly, as it must have disturbed and puzzled, probably alarmed as well, anybody else. Not that he had the faintest idea how that hat had vanished, nor any explanation of the footstep he had indubitably heard, but that strangely— in some strange way— he knew it was explicable. He understood that it was all right, using both words precisely in their true meaning. The notion of a thief or burglar left his mind entirely. The agency by which the hat had been removed was, literally, all right. That it was being worn now in the gusty rain and wind, as he felt positive it *was* being worn, he knew equally, was all right. His mind and pen used the schoolboy phrase, where a more lettered choice would doubtless have used "natural." For "natural" as against supernatural was assuredly what he meant. The positive assurance of its rightness and naturalness, he mentioned, was "all over him."

The reading of *Arabia Deserta*, therefore, continued easily and delightfully, and it must have been fully an hour later when a sound again caught his absorbed attention. It was, again, indubitably a footstep, again just outside his door, where someone was walking quietly along the corridor. He heard a gentle click. The same moment he laid his book aside and was out of his room in the little hallway. The light, he saw, to his astonishment was turned on. Perhaps fifteen seconds was the interval between hearing the sounds and standing in the hallway. The corridor was empty, the chain hung securely in its iron groove, no door banged or was stealthily closed, but there was another alteration in the detail of the familiar scene that this time he detected at once.

The macintosh, the fawn-coloured macintosh, no longer lay on the divan. It had disappeared. Following the old grey hat, it had been taken too.

Someone who had taken the hat had now come back and taken the macintosh as well. That was as plain as the nose on his face. Both articles had been removed while he sat reading his book, removed by someone who had found an entry into the flat twice in succession, and who, similarly, had left it again twice in succession, each time with extraordinary rapidity. This was clear and positive; but it was equally clear and positive that there was no conceivable way of entry or departure, no possible way by which any human being could have got into the flat and out of it again. The same positive certainty applied to the question of hiding. Faced with which definite and perplexing certainties, he yet was fully aware that the whole puzzle was explicable as simply, above all as naturally, as though he had himself opened the front door and given away the missing articles with his own hands.

Standing in the passage, now flooded with light, he found other positive assurances in him too, and these were as definitely certain as the fact that his wristwatch showed the hour of one o'clock. These positive assurances admitted of no arguing, needed no consideration even; they merely presented themselves to his mind as knowledge. He was convinced of them as he was convinced that his watch face showed one o'clock:

Both hat and macintosh had been removed by human agency. The taker had not been secreted in the flat beforehand, but had entered and left. This taker, moreover, strangely, was still here, still in the flat, even though he had left. The impossibility of this presented no difficulty somehow. The taker, indeed, stood at this actual moment very close to him, as close as hands or feet. This conviction of intimate proximity did not disturb him.

"It is all right," he heard his mind saying to itself, "it is quite all right and natural…."

The taker, he realised further, was not a thief, but someone who needed both hat and macintosh, someone who could use them, wear them, with a clear conscience, someone who was using and wearing them at this very moment— now.

With such positive and convinced knowledge in him, he did not therefore waste time in making a further useless search, but stood there in the lighted corridor, dealing with these inconsistent and incredible facts. For facts they were, though how precisely he "dealt" with them lay beyond his powers to describe. Not with his mind assuredly, he asserts, nor with any faculties of reasoning or analysis. His medium of expression in words, in literary form, here failed him completely; he used the term "dealt" and made no more exact attempt at description. The incredible inconsistencies and obvious

impossibilities, he says merely, did not exist. Neither fear nor nervousness of any kind came near him. He accepted the blazing absurdities quite calmly, standing motionless for a moment, listening, watching. Then he glanced at his watch. It was 2.30. The "moment," therefore, actually had been an hour and a half.

"It didn't surprise or startle you?"

He shook his head and smiled.

"And that hour and a half you were standing in the passage— you've any recollection of it? Ninety minutes— I mean, or just a moment? Did it seem long or short? Did nothing happen to you in all that time?"

He answered simply, and without hesitation:

"Well— rain and wind were in my face," he told me. "It was cold. My feet were wet, my body ached like hell, I remember sneezing and shivering. Then there came the comfort of warmth, the heat of a warm bar in a dirty pub., and two or three glasses of beer— of bitter, rather. I dislike bitter very much."

"Sleeping?" I asked. "Do you remember sleeping anywhere? Lying down? Going to bed, for instance?"

He laughed a little. "In a dim way, yes," he said. "I changed half-a-crown and the bed was ninepence, but that was somewhere else. And they took a fiddle from me, a fiddle and case, and gave me a ticket. Only, the room was packed with lousy men and stank so that I— sorry— I was sick on the floor—"

"That's a positive memory?"

He nodded with a rueful smile. "I looked at my watch just after it," he said, grinning again. "It was 2.30 and I was standing in the corridor."

Sense of an interval, I gathered next, there was none; yet a sense of duration, apparently, there was.

"You found yourself exactly where you were when you left your book to look for the possible intruder?"

"In the same spot."

"Any thought, any recollection, of the fiddler in the rain still in your mind?" I asked.

"None whatever."

"You had forgotten his existence?" I insisted.

There was a moment's hesitation, as though he wanted to be extremely accurate.

"No thought or picture of the man came to my mind," he said. "He didn't crop up once. I thought of him later, of course— next day, I mean. But in the corridor— nothing."

"And the missing hat and macintosh— the possible thief or intruder— did that bother you?"

"Oh, I remember that passed through my mind," he admitted, with his frank, delightful smile, "but— I had no feeling of bother—"

"Or question?"

"Or question," he agreed.

"You felt comfortable and happy— normal?"

After an instant's hesitation he accepted that. "I felt a sort of inner relief," he found his words. "Relieved, yes, that's the word. Sort of pleased and comforted, you know." And then he repeated the first adjective: "relieved."

"Any sign of your having left the house and been out of doors?" I fired at him.

He answered instantly. "Soaked to the skin." He laughed outright then. "And a little sick— a touch of nausea perhaps." He grinned like a boy who had eaten sweet things unwisely. "What I did then? What I did next? Oh, I got out of my wet clothes, had a hot bath in Auntie's lovely bathroom, and went to bed and slept like a top till nine o'clock next morning."

Such a detail as the notorious licensing hours seemed hardly worth mentioning, I felt, though it was in both our minds, of course. In an experience where Before and After held no meaning, where a single individual, it seemed, could operate in two different places simultaneously, argument about such different time and space struck me as useless. I let it pass. I lit a cigarette and looked hard at him with an examining eye across the smoke. His own expression and manner betrayed no doubt or hesitation of any kind. He was frank and honest as a child. Nothing veridical anywhere, absolutely nothing, I thought to myself. Aloud I then said: "You see now why a written account of all this could not interest anyone— because of its utter, its hopeless, incredibility. To the ordinary man even normal, linear time is muddling enough sometimes. Most folk are rather disturbed, too, by any too vivid visualisation of the past, but a glimpse of the future means almost consulting a mental specialist. The two together, just baldly written down—"

We laughed together, but while he laughed he began fumbling in his pocket and a moment later produced a scrap of dirty paper and handed it across to me.

"I found this when I woke up," he said. "It was on the floor beside my bed."

It was a doss-house ticket in the name of John Doe, the date stamped on it by a rubber stamp, with the words "One fiddle and case."

"The date is right," he mentioned quietly. "The address— well, you've read my manuscript."

I left this detail too till later, since it was a verifiable one, and in due course *was* verified by myself, for I called at the doss-house, presented the receipt, and now have a fiddle and case in a cupboard of my library. I took up some

further questions first. About sleeping, for instance: had he, to his knowledge, ever fallen asleep in an upright position? He had not. Then, were his dreams as a rule actual and vivid? They were not, and for the simple reason that his sleep was always dreamless. He had never once dreamed, he assured me, in his whole life.

"I have never known a dream," he told me, adding that of course that might only mean that he never remembered them. "My eight hours' sleep every night go just like that," and he clicked his fingers in the air. "I shut my eyes, I wake up. It's like a minute. A dream would probably be as strange to me as— as, say, the taste of alcohol. That's probably why the bitter made me sick that time."

The pause between us, though it lasted several minutes, had nothing awkward or embarrassing about it. The prolonged silence was as natural as if I had been sitting in a wood with trees all round me. Oak, beech and pine may overcharge a receptive mind with communications of a rather pregnant silence to which no comment by way of audible response is possible.

I jumped back to something his written account had dismissed with a dozen words:

"The taker, as you call him— were you conscious, when standing in the corridor, of his presence?"

"Of his existence, yes," he answered.

"As another person?"

"Another— no," came the prompt reply.

"One?" I asked.

He nodded emphatically. "Just one," he agreed with decision.

"Very close to you, very near, you felt him?"

"We occupied the same space— as close as that." Then he laughed. "And how can we get that into a formula?" he asked me with a grin.

IT WAS some considerable time later, the voluble aunt back from Paris, when a sort of climax appeared: a "sort" of climax, for in his written version it was evidently intended as such, though its crude, brief manner of presentation made it merely the addition of another wholly incredible episode.

He was strolling along Jermyn Street shortly before one o'clock to a luncheon engagement, and he was dressed accordingly in what he called his "best," tidy at any rate and looking a very presentable, even handsome, figure, and being ahead of time he was idling along rather. He carried only a cane. It was a sunny day, the air soft and warm, with the lovely radiance of an Indian summer snatched from June. The light creamed over almost into blossom, the sweetness was like perfume.

"Your mind occupied?" I enquired, since there was no mention of his mood. "Particularly occupied, I mean?"

He shook his head. "Just hungry," he said, "and looking forward to lunch, while enjoying the day, of course— I mean, you couldn't help *that*. It changed the street and houses so—"

"A change in yourself too of any kind?" I put in quickly.

"A bit, yes. I felt a change coming— something or other in me— trembling a little—"

When his attention was drawn suddenly to a figure across the street and slightly ahead of him, the figure of a tall man looking into a shop-window. But his attention was not merely drawn, apparently, it was definitely arrested, so that he stopped dead on the kerb and stared For some seconds, half a minute possibly, he stood quite still, watching the figure, staring at it, as it moved to the next shop-window a little further on. The man, in spite of the warm sun, was wearing a light fawn-coloured macintosh, and on his head was an old grey felt hat. Only the back of the figure was visible, as the man stooped over and peered into the windows, pacing slowly along, and now and again returning a little on his steps.

He watched the figure with the keenest possible intentness for perhaps another minute or so, and then realised that the person was no longer the same. It was not the same figure, something had happened, it was another, a different, person pacing to and fro. He declared that he knew instantly who it was, this changed figure, knew instantly, too, that he must cross the street and join him. He must be very quick, he must go over immediately without a second's delay. It was imperative beyond all doubt or question to act at once, as imperative— he used a striking simile here in his written version— as to seize a flung rope when you were just sinking for the last time. And he obeyed the impulse, yet even while doing so, while dodging the rather slow traffic, he had time to become aware of another thing as well. His reference to it was brief, a passing mention merely, but its importance to me seemed vital, and I linked it in my mind with his hearing of the Tchaikovsky *Andante* in the wet and windy street earlier in the adventure.

It was music, though music of a kind that would have left the majority unaffected: a group of four men, singing for alms, had turned the corner up from St. James's Square into Jermyn Street, and their voices, if rough, were good. They sang in tune, they sang with feeling, there was pathos, even beauty, in the Irish air that only just overrode the traffic rumble.

He caught it as he crossed, and the change he had already mentioned in himself 'became intensified. This change he had felt coming a moment earlier now abruptly established itself. It was all over him, within him, definitely there.

"You can put a label to it?" I asked. "Describe it?"

He nodded, a smile of peculiar radiance flashed to his face and vanished.

"Loveliness," he whispered softly.

This was the word used in his manuscript, but mentioned without further elaboration, and I wanted to hear if he could add to it. Questions and answers may be summarised, and what he said was good and easily understandable up to a point. For the beauty of the morning, of which he had already been quite aware, fell upon him with a sudden abruptness for some reason that held shock. With a rush it came over him, "like a burning flame of fire," as he put it, and the music of those singing voices seemed a spear-head that pierced him to the core. This intensification was due, apparently, to the combination of the light and colour, and the sound. This "loveliness," which had nothing to do directly with the figure he was watching, burst upon him with its overwhelming, shattering appeal. And he tried to explain, in answer to my questions, that a fellow's normal state held no machinery adequate for— using the verb he favoured so often— with such loveliness, for it strained almost to breaking point every receptive faculty a man possessed.

"So I went across to him," he continued, "diagonally over the street, dodging the 'traffic, and came up with the figure very rapidly, and looked over the man's shoulder as he stared into the shop, and saw by the reflection of the face in the window who it was. The two pairs of eyes met fairly and squarely in the glass."

And here, without worrying him with the numerous questions that worried myself, I went straight on to the next point in the Adventure exactly as his manuscript description took it.

"In which instant," I said, "you found yourself— not in Jermyn Street at all?"

Although we both knew the answer, it came naturally and promptly:

"I found myself in one of those little side-streets that run off Baker Street, perhaps a mile and a half away, and it was raining quite heavily, and I was mighty glad that I was wearing my macintosh and my old grey felt hat,and I had something in my hands, though it was too dark— oh, yes, it was night of course— too dark to see exactly what it was, and a window was flung open suddenly far above me on the opposite side, and someone threw out a coin wrapped in a piece of white paper which the wind blew away sideways, and just as I crept after it and picked it up, I found myself in the lobby of a restaurant in Jermyn Street again, my host a few yards away waiting, while I pocketed a cloak-room ticket from a pageboy, and I had just said to this boy 'Both hats— you took both hats?' and the boy was answering with a grin,

'There was only one, sir— a black felt hat and a cane,' as I stuffed the ticket in my waistcoat pocket entirely satisfied that the boy was right."

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IT WAS sufficiently easy, of course, to check a good many of his statements, and I did this thoroughly enough to satisfy at least myself. Beyond this I felt no interest, for in examining cases of such abnormal kind the verdict of the man in the street seemed to me valueless. Judgements of the herd, being expressions of the herd-instinct, are invariably negative, self-preservation making all innovation abhorrent and dangerous. Anything that attacks the established order must be crushed out. Nor had I any desire to justify experiences that would hold in a court of law. What interested me, frankly, was this chance personal justification of ideas and theories my own research and speculation had led me to think might not be wholly impossible.

In the sense that a mad mind is a mind out of relation with its environment, John Smith-Jones was madder than any Carrolian hatter. He was a crazy man, suffering from acute paranoia, a victim of absurd, incurable delusions, while yet a saner man, a mind more perfectly in relation with its environment I swear I have never met. Environment indeed is here the master word, for his environment was unquestionably an extended one. It was an environment otherwise conditioned, familiar with expansion in space and time.

I made few notes of what had so far come my way from his accounts. Strictly speaking, only one or two conclusions seemed definite enough to be worth setting down on paper, and these I arrived at after hearing a number of his Adventures, not merely the one just sketched. And the first is easily stated: he possessed another way of "knowing," a way not open to ordinary folk, though affirmed in the *Yogi* teachings of the East to be accessible to those who can dare the necessary training. Apparently, to stop thinking is the first essential, in other words to arrest the ordinary method of knowing and to get behind thought. Obviously, to cease thinking is a labour of Hercules that, open potentially to all, can be achieved actually by extremely few. John Smith-Jones managed it easily and naturally.

The second conclusion I arrived at was also clear enough: that an Adventure only followed when certain antecedent conditions were precisely right. Unless these exact conditions supervened, his life was as normal and commonplace as yours or mine, but with their arrival he slipped into a state of other consciousness as naturally as one slips from waking into sleeping, or vice versa. All moved on oiled ball bearings, there was no jerk, no hitch, no shock or sense of violent transition. And once in the Adventure, once experiencing it,

the intense reality of it was overmastering. It held a shattering intensity of conviction that made it seem his usual state, his daily life in comparison a dream-like kind of brief semi-consciousness.

These antecedent conditions, moreover, were easily recognisable, and can be summed up in a single word: beauty. A message of beauty flamed upon him and he was off! Whether the message came by sound, form, or colour made no difference. Loveliness was the key, and loveliness, blazing upon him as with the power of some awful lightning, fused the limitations of normal consciousness and introduced him into a state of changed consciousness where another way of knowing operated and where time and space lost their pitiful limitations.

The power of beauty to heighten susceptibility and intensify consciousness is, of course, established; but in his case there was more than this. Not merely an intensification, but a different type, of consciousness altogether supervened.

The Adventure in Gloucestershire was induced apparently by the intoxicating loveliness of the May in an ordinary English Spring. What layer of time and space he tapped here, whether medieval, or perhaps not even strictly his own, is not for me to say. That I followed it at all was due to some out of the way reading I had done. To the ages of superstition, of course, belongs the alchemist's notion that man is a fourfold combination of the elements, then limited to four instead of over ninety, and that while his physical body was the vehicle for manifestation on earth, it held also three other vehicles for manifesting, respectively, in air, water, and fire. Sylphs, undines, salamanders remain today the nursery myths of what was once, no doubt, believed in all sincerity and, who shall prove, not based upon authentic experience?

The Adventure, at any rate, sprang from the quite commonplace opportunity of a lift by motor a friend offered him into the wilds of Gloucestershire, and the friend was a brown-eyed woman who meant no more to him, he told me, than the girl in the box-office of some cinema where he might buy a ticket.

"THE MAY'S rather poor this year, don't you think…." she remarked.

On the way out of London this seemed true, the hedges thinly covered, or without any blossoms at all, but as the car crossed Buckinghamshire it gave signs of rising to the surface, in Oxfordshire it showed still thicker, and when Gloucestershire was reached the fragrant white blossoms poured in shining creamy cataracts down the sloping meadows. There was this suggestion of careless rioting. In old-world gardens, too, as the car rushed by, the laburnum,

with its pools of dripping gold, was lavish, even to wantonness, while such a glory of buttercups, he thought, he had never seen before.

"The A.A. men are such a decent class, I always think…."

If only she would have let him enjoy it in peace and without interruptions. It was kind of her, of course, to give him this lift on her way to Broadway Village, a score of miles beyond where he had to go; she drove well and safely too, so that, much as he disliked motoring, he felt confidence and was free to enjoy the scenery without worrying about corners and traffic. If only she would leave him to his enjoyment. It was her stream of comments, dealing with the obvious top of life, that broke with interrupting jerks into his deep pool of intense delight and ruined its clear surface, making a rejoinder of some sort necessary. For this Spring loveliness, always a disconcerting experience, brought its customary sweet pain. Today, after months in a London street, the sunshine over this riot of flowers came with a kind of shock. There were foaming torrents of wild hemlock too, the beech leaves at their tenderest, and the grey stone villages rose through a dream, beauty shining everywhere with a poignancy that hurt.

"Wonderfully well marked, the roads, aren't they?" she commented, as they sped through a stretch of loveliness that seemed hardly of this world at all….

Inside him lay a glass, a mirror, some medium at any rate in which was transmuted all he saw and felt into an ineffable shimmering glory of delight, hinting at transcendental meanings he almost captured, yet never quite.

"Thirty-five's quite fast enough, isn't it? We're ahead of time…." plopped with a little splash into his silent inner pool just when something of translucent gauze and brilliant wings flew towards him with a sudden revelation.

"Oh, rather— quite— it's just right, I'm sure," he managed to jerk back with the proper polite interest, turning his head awkwardly towards her as he did so, for it had been precisely in just this fraction of a second that he was first aware of the change about him. It came stealing up and over, yet with its customary instantaneous swiftness, for it was already there, increasing, growing possibly in power, yet definitely established in a flash. It rose from some inmost and viewless centre of the day itself, from that deep heart of painful loveliness, that central power of stinging beauty, through which the car sped with its purring sound.

Purring, yes; that was precisely the right word. The voice, too, was purring….

She had just said something, another remark, and he wondered if he had heard it correctly at first: "Here lies our shell of fire, air, water, earth…." Was that what she said? A phrase so meaningless could not have left anyone's

throat, hers least of all, at such a time and place. He had misunderstood; the car needed water, with more petrol, Shell of course, opening a window for fresh air— anything but what she had seemed to say and he had oat to hear. Then turning to glance at her, this thin, brown-eyed woman, he had sharply realised in the same instant that she was comely. The idea had never entered his head before. He had merely known in a vague kind of way that her voice was pleasant, soothing rather, her smile, if crooked slightly yet not disfiguringly, lit the face oddly, and that the eyes were clear shiny brown. Now, as he stared into them, they held a touch of fiery amber, though that must have been the sun of course.

"Eh?— oh, yes—" he stammered, bewildered by his having possibly mis-caught the words, and then heard his voice adding in quite another tone, a tone that held something whispering about it: "It's fire with me, remember. I move most easily in that—"

"Fire!" she laughed. "As if I didn't know it already! I'm air, of course. We are friendly then. Air and fire work together…."

A grinding noise like the roar of a lion, a sudden jerk that shot him forward against the windscreen, interrupted, so that he caught his breath and shielded his face with outstretched hands. There came no crash, however. The car had stopped.

"Hulloa!" he cried, withdrawing his eyes from hers with a kind of difficulty, and wondering why his voice had turned hoarse and trembling. "Not an accident, is it?" He heard her give a quick choked-off laugh in her throat as she said "Sorry! These four-wheel brakes. I forgot. We're wrong anyhow— our last turn, I think—" She turned her head round. "You might go and ask that old man where this road goes."

Her voice died away, as he got out and made his way, as in a dream, to the figure leaning against a gate, an old fellow in gaiters who eyed his questioner good-humouredly enough. A lurcher at his feet got up and sniffed at his approach. "No," growled the old fellow, showing broken teeth in a grin intended to be friendly, "this road don't go any further'n the farm yonder." He pointed with his stick to a scattered group of grey stone buildings fifty yards ahead. "That's where the man fell over the edge," he added with his growling chuckle.

"Fell over the edge!"

The old fellow repeated the chuckle that was half grunt, half growl. He seemed amused, as though the man who fell over the edge had only got his deserts. "He thought it went on. It don't. The road ends sudden," he explained curtly enough. "But you can get shelter there maybe. They'll take you in."

He turned his attention to his lurcher to signify that was all he wanted to say, and the other gave his thanks and swung back towards the car, noticing as he did so out of the corner of his eye a stretch of bare down above the buildings, where against the skyline a gaunt single tree stood out, a big torn branch hanging down loosely and swaying in the wind. Only the car, as he now turned back to report the old man's words, no longer stood there. No vehicle at all was there except an open cart of sorts, with a tired horse in the shafts, the reins held by a woman wearing, he saw, some shoddy cheap fur about her neck. The brightness and the gay morning sunshine, too, were gone. That lonely tree, it struck him, stood out now against a sky of leaden clouds. The entire scene was gloomy, and with a rising wind that struck cold against the cheek. The dusk was falling fast.

He approached the cart slowly, the woman's eyes watching him steadily, the only portion of her face visible, as they peered out through a welter of wrapped shawls about her head and shoulders. But the woman, he knew, for all her shoddy clothes, was comely. He was aware of silken hair. At the same time those staring eyes, rather intently fixed, made him think of a feline that looks for prey, an unwelcome notion he could not by any means account for.

"Come on out," he said in a voice of pretended control, for he was frightened, though the slight shiver running over him might well have been due to the bitter wind. The woman, he felt suddenly and sharply, was somewhere too strong for him. She was very sure of herself. "We're lucky. We can get shelter in that farm. The horse is done, anyhow. Get out— will you?"

She unwound her shawls a little as he helped her out, but she missed the yielding iron step and a length of fine leg appeared in a grey worsted stocking that yet could not hide its shapeliness. He made her take his arm, while his other hand led the stumbling, weary nag, and at that moment, as though from under her very skirts, a large tawny cat, that seemed to have sprung from the old cart, ran past and ahead of them with a silent dancing gait. It had, no doubt, emerged from the hedge, he hurriedly told himself. It disappeared in the deepening shadows towards the old grey buildings. A column of pale blue smoke rose from the main chimney, but almost at once turned downwards, sinking rapidly, as in sign of coming bad weather, floating in sullen, heavy coils, then, past the lower mullioned windows.

"I'm air … and that means we're friendly … for air helps fire…" rang on in his ears as he approached the old grey building, knocked, and enquired about shelter.

"I'll put the 'oss away," he muttered, as the old beldame opened the door and accepted the benighted couple, nor did it occur to him even that he said "'oss," or that he stepped in hesitatingly. He only noticed, to tell the truth, that

his friend, the slim, brown-eyed woman, brushed past him with rather a masterful air as though she had a right to shelter here, perhaps expected it, and that his nostrils caught a whiff of perfume, half artificial, half of sweet warmish animal fur, as she went by him into the lamp-lit room.

It occurred to him suddenly, while these two talked together of the stormy night and the blind road that ended in a sudden drop where horses, sheep and cattle too easily went lost, that he had left his flint-lock in the cart. And while putting the 'oss to stable he now hid it beneath his heavy coat and brought it back into the house. What made him do so he could not rightly say. There was uneasiness in him, a fear of some sort, a fear of uncommon things, and that was all he knew, a fear that, like the wind, came suddenly and also, like the wind, was rising….

The thick onion soup had a welcome, fragrant smell when he came back, and he sat down to his bowl without a word or question, and broke his coarse bread into it hungrily. Then, looking up, he noticed how hungrily she, too, gulped her soup, yet daintily, and how delicious her moist red lips were. Even when she blew across her big spoon to cool the steaming mixture, she did it invitingly, her brown eyes gleaming above the succulent mouthful. His strange uneasiness grew as he watched, but something else rose up to meet it. A light shudder ran through him.

"God! Am I so weak and easily taken?…" passed through his mind, for he knew that, even if weak and trembling at an offer so perilously easy, this was something he did *not* mean to yield to. As a Disciple of the Order, as a wrestling and struggling Aspirant, this casual loss of valuable energy, above all else, must not dare to tempt him. Oh, he felt sure of himself and his vows, confident enough in all conscience. With some vehemence he gave himself this hurried assurance. When the scene was gaily set, he reminded himself, among lights and music, wine and colour, he had no fear, for danger was too obvious and flaunting. But it was this chancy, so unlikely setting, in a gloomy farm upon a wayside road, seeking shelter merely for a few hours from an ill-omened night and threatening weather, and with a woman who, foe all her soft brown eyes and comeliness, was surely but of passing acquaintance, it was this very casualness, hiding a stiletto beneath the homespun, that made him tremble.

He gave an involuntary start as her voice reached him across the table:

"You brought in the flint-lock," she said suddenly between her draughts of soup. "Is it then a cat you are afraid of?" her soft laugh showing her white even teeth. "A yellow-backed farm cat?" Her eyes held his without wavering.

"A cat?" he asked thickly, taken by surprise. "Did you see a cat?"

"There's always a cat in these old farm-houses," she told him, taking a mouthful of the fried ham and eggs now set before them. "If you don't meet a

barking dog, it always means they keep a cat, and they're generally amber-coloured." Her eyes still held him.

"I brought in the gun," he admitted a trifle sullenly, "because— this is the sort of place that favours the highwaymen for a night's lodging. And tomorrow, even sooner, we may be glad of it, for you never know."

"Tomorrow," she repeated, without lowering her steady eyes. "Yes, tomorrow maybe," and she wiped her lips, which gleamed moistly in the lamplight.

The coffee was drinkable, the rum still better, and when he complained of the cold she mixed his second glass, and then his third, having swallowed a sturdy two herself. Her breath, drawing towards him across the narrow table where her elbows rested, her face thrust forward, seemed to mingle with the sweet-flavoured liquor; and it was when the old farmwife, beldame as he first thought her, came in to ask if all was to their liking, that he caught the abrupt swift certainty that the two women were not unacquainted, not strangers to one another. And on the instant, though he gave no outward sign, his whole being rose in sudden, alert challenge. He knew, of a surety, the brown-eyed woman had led him here with purpose. The old tired horse, he remembered now, had made to take another turning as of habitual instinct while she had persuaded it, aye and himself too, otherwise along the rough trail below the down.

"It's an old beast, eh, that tawny cat of yours?" he asked abruptly of the farmwife, aiming to take her by surprise. "A fine creature too," he added admiringly.

"Cat!" she replied. "There's not a cat within a twenty mile of here. I mislike the things and wouldn't have one about me."

"A stray cat, dear," put in the brown-eyed woman quickly, but not so quickly that the quick sharp glance between the pair was lost upon him. He emptied his glass to hide the awkwardness with some natural gesture.

"They do come strayin' over the hill sometimes," the old woman was saying, "but they don't stay long," she added significantly, "for they know I won't abide 'em." And she got up and began to clear away the dishes.

"Yet you have a power of mice," he put in. "They're useful to you— a good sharp cat, I mean."

She never raised her eyes. "Useful to some, maybe," she mumbled, "but they're more'n of this world and best put away, to my way of thinkin'."

He shivered, without knowing exactly why, so that the brown-eyed woman— she was not really thin at all, he noticed again, but most sweetly and comfortably covered— poured him out a glass of yellow rum. "It makes me

shiver too, dear," she murmured soothingly, "and this will just make us sleep good and proper. It was a cold job putting the 'oss to stable, I'll be bound."

He swallowed it heartily enough, determined to give no sign if he could help it that he realised something here to do with cats he did not welcome, knew also that he was betrayed, and the amber of her soft brown eyes, he was aware, again slipped stealthily into the gleaming contents of his glass, so that he drank that down too with the rich liquor.

This acceptance and refusal he felt in him, this strength and weakness, lay beyond his entangling; it was as though a portion of his being was growing slowly a little numbed, and he could not be sure whether the rum soothed or stimulated the deep uneasiness that growled out of sight within him….

Their rooms were far apart, at opposite ends of the old building, and as he went to bed he heard that rising wind pass alternately sighing and roaring over the grey tiles and naked downs beyond, an unholy wind, he was persuaded, renewing the faint shudder in his mind with the vivid thought of that old tired tree against the skyline. He saw again the loose dangling branch swinging creakily.

"Good night, dear," he heard her voice at the corner of the landing when they parted, candle in hand, and saw her amber eyes gleaming brightly in the unsteady flame.

IT WAS the increasing tumult of that violent, unholy wind beating against the narrow casements of his room that mingled with her last words as he stood on the boards by the light of a single candle, hesitating whether to undress or not. The rum worked in his blood, but something else worked too, and instinct, since alcohol dulls the reasoning faculties, was expressly alert. This instinct played a game as it were, a game that lacked form, but assuredly did not lack meaning. It played with several counters, and these counters, if a trifle confused, were insistent in the claim they made upon his attention. He could visualise them distinctly, he could name them correctly, all three of them: that large yellow-backed cat, the understanding between the two women, and the flint-lock.

His mind took each in turn and dealt with it after a fashion.

The gun— he had, after all, left it downstairs; the cat— he had not seen it again; the two women— at the remote end of the house, yet, he somehow knew, far from being in bed and asleep. But it was the gun that chiefly held his attention. He wanted it near, he wished he had it ready to his hand in this dim-lit room. It lay in the hall, he remembered, beneath his overcoat on the settle. The next thought was easy: he would go down and get it. Obeying the instinct,

he stole across the floor on tiptoe and cautiously opened his door, and then, without knowing why, he hesitated. He stopped dead. He listened intently.

What made him hesitate? What caused the moment's uncertainty? Thought, of course. He had begun to think. It was reason that blocked the flow of automatic guiding instinct. Was he, then, afraid of anything, he asked himself? Of anyone? Of highwaymen, least of all, he told himself. Of a great cat with a yellow back? Assuredly not. Then why did he want the gun? He could not use a gun against a comely woman with amber eyes; nor for that matter, he swore to himself again, did he need any means of defence against such temptation except his own firm confident will.

For a second, as he stood hesitating by the door, such thoughts tumbled about in him, and the next second, dismissing them, he passed through the door and crept softly along the landing, lit by the gleam from the candle left behind him. Silent and dark the landing was, though the wind outside made a mighty howling as its gusts stormed against the walls. These passed, leaving a silence deeper than before. He crept along, knowing that the creaking board, if anyone listened, would be put down to the blustering wind. Stealthily, he moved. Remembering the way, he turned right and left when necessary, following the next dim landing correctly, till he reached the stairs that led down into the black well of the hall. Peering down into this murky space, no single outline was discernible. Nothing stirred, there seemed no movement. Both women were safe away in their distant beds. He crept forward down the stairs, and was already more than half-way down when he caught a faint glimmer of light below him by the settle where the gun lay underneath his overcoat.

It was so faint, however, that he doubted his eyes, and, there— even while he stared— it was gone again! Reaching the lowest step without seeing it return, he was certain he had been mistaken. He crossed the hall on tiptoe, came to the corner where the gun lay hidden below the overcoat, stretched out his hand to grope for it, and in that instant his fingers touched something warm and soft and furry. He was aware of perfume, a tiny point of light appeared as well, and the flint-lock was placed deliberately into his outstretched hands.

"I was just bringing it up to you," a low pleasant whisper startled him. "For I knew you would like it near you this night." The same moment the point of light grew into a sudden little flare that died out as soon as born, yet not before he had caught the swift picture of a face, two cupped hands shading a match, and the gleam of two amber-coloured eyes that peered into his own.

"You are cold," he faltered, muttering the words in his throat, shivering himself as he spoke, for he realised that the soft warm thing he touched was a strip of shoddy fur about the neck. "Why should you—

"Hush!" she interrupted in a whisper, placing a hand gently on his mouth, covering her figure at the same time with his overcoat from the settle, then drawing him backwards more deeply into the corner and making him crouch low beside her. Her warm body lay close against him, her breath perfumed his cheek, as they sank down and hid against the wall. His arm had fallen naturally about her, as she half knelt, half sat, with her weight upon his side. And then someone, shading a light with a thin bony hand, the lines of the fingers visibly marked, came stepping cautiously down the stairs towards the hall.

So suddenly, so quickly, all this happened that it left him worse than bewildered. He stared. His eyes never left that slowly approaching light. The sweet comfort of the woman's warm body against his own bemused clear vision still further. Yet what chiefly darkened his mind, fluttering thought, emotion, judgement, was the friendly offer of the gun, supporting so unexpectedly his own desire and intention. For how had she thus forestalled his purpose so adroitly, how even become aware of it? Was this a move in her game, a sinister move that mere chance had enabled him to surprise? Was she then with him, after all, rather than against him? Who was the friend and who the enemy? He was warily on guard and alert, but any clear solution failed to present itself. Could she have divined, this amber-eyed woman, that his own will and strength made him invulnerable, that his vows were not so easily rendered vain? Did she seek, perhaps, merely to place a dart, then twist it later in a burning wound that would find alleviation only upon its withdrawal— by her own fingers?

This flashed across him while he watched the descending light creep farther down the stairs towards the hall. Who bore that light he could not see. The holder moved without a sound, the boards were silent, no single creak was audible. The soft breathing against his ear was all he heard, the beating of another heart against his own.

The light reached the last stair and passed slowly, as with a gliding motion, across the hall towards them, then paused within a dozen feet of where he crouched. But now the vague shape behind it was not so vague that he could not distinguish it, and he recognised the bent, huddled outline of the old farm woman. It was curious then that, simultaneously with this recognition, another picture leaped with startling significance before his eyes, but before the eyes of memory, and he saw for a vivid second that gaunt sinister tree on the brow of the naked hill, and realised that the torn loose branch dangling in the wind was a body and no branch at all. This mental recognition gave him a startling,

uneasy twist of horror, but it vanished swiftly under the strain of yet greater horror that now followed instantly, as he witnessed something he had always known about, but yet had never seen actually with his own eyes.

He saw it happen a dozen feet in front of him, though in light so confused and dim that outlines were blurred and no sharp edges showed. For the beldame, as she shaded the faint rushlight, became most singularly transformed. Abruptly her figure shook down, as it were, into another figure, a figure much closer to the ground, an animal figure, a creature on all fours. The point of light shivered an instant, then became twin lights, a pair of shining eyes that gleamed out of a bluntish muzzle below two sharply pointed ears. They were fixed steadily upon his own staring face, but vanished the same moment as though turned aside, so that their light was lost. A light, quick pattering, as of scuttling paws, came straight in his direction, shooting across the floor to the corner where he lay in darkness. "The cat, the monstrous cat," slashed in letters of fire across his brain.

"To the Sabbath," rose a whisper that yet held the quality of a shriek kept somehow in abeyance, for it was a shriek in exultation. "The wind delights, there are no stars, the brow of the hill is waiting! Bring the sacrifice, dearie, and let the Master see him burn!" From the very floor against his feet the awful voice came rushing.

A terrific gust of wind that shook the building, shook him into a clearer understanding perhaps as well. He felt the warm fragrant body quiver against his own, he felt the weight and pressure become heavier, and was aware in the same instant that the fur he had called shoddy covered not the neck and shoulders only, but spread now over the whole shape completely, covering it indeed from head to tail.

"Two of them— a pair!" his thought gasped frantically, as he gave a violent, spasmodic jerk. He remembered the huge, tawny cat, that yellow beast which sprang so strangely from the cart, if not from his companion's very skirts. He remembered other awful changelings too, the hare, the fox— and a shiver as of death convulsed his body.

"Keep still, my pet, keep quiet," came the purring voice against his smothered ear, while the weight upon him increased with sudden, horrifying pressure. "You are safe with me, I hold you fast, and fire and air work friendly."

He could hardly breathe, such was the suffocating smother of warm fur upon his face and lips; it was well-nigh impossible to stir a foot or leg. The weight took the very air from his mouth, and almost the last resistance from his very heart as well. The heat, the stifling heat, overcame him.

"I'll come," he mumbled thickly, fighting for space and air.

"You must," was the answer that he heard, his helplessness knowing it for true, but in the same instant precisely heard also the pair of them whispering and muttering between themselves. No words, much less sentences, not even syllables indeed, reached his mind, but he caught, despite his smothering, the tone of utterance. And an awful realisation crashed in upon his weakening faculties. A forgotten phrase leaped into memory: "the utterance of demons is indistinct, thin and hoarse."

And the horror of the memory, salved from what seemed now distant, almost forgotten teaching, passed like forked lightning into his final store of energies. He made a gigantic effort. The weight was lifted from him by a fraction, shifting itself, at any rate, to another angle— and a hand, as by magic, became partially released. How he contrived it Jay utterly beyond him, how his fingers lay suddenly clutched upon the flint-lock, how they contrived the priming, found and pressed the trigger, bringing the flash and explosion in the darkness, timing with the roar of the storm outside— all this he never knew. He only knew that the suffocating weight relaxed, and that a wild, high, dreadful scream, half animal, half human, crashed against his very ears….

"WE MUST HAVE gone wrong at the last turning," she was saying. "If you'll get in again, I'll back her up. It's only a few hundred yards. The old man is right about the road ending suddenly. We don't want to go over the edge…."

He climbed back into the car, which she then deftly manoeuvred up the little incline till they reached the fork where the mistake had been made. As it swung slowly round, the brow of the bare down filled his open window for a moment, and he saw the gaunt ugly tree where the dead branch had dangled, only now no branch was there, and only the shattered outline of the ancient tree broke against the blue sky of spring.

It caught her eye too, apparently, though her attention was centred on the car.

"That hill and tree," she remarked casually, her gaze fixed chiefly on the ditch and width of road for turning, "there's something about it in the map. They used it for hanging witches once, or burnt them on that hill— I forget exactly what."

As he consulted the route map provided by the A.A. and confirmed the reference, she turned her head, so that he saw the blood on her cheek— a long, thin, reddened line as though a bullet had just grazed it. He made no reference to it, nor was she, apparently, aware of it, but an hour later, when she set him down at his point on the road, he saw her, from a little distance as she drove away, wiping it with a handkerchief which she first moistened on her red lips.

13: The Pear-Shaped Diamond

Edgar Wallace

1875-1932

The Sunday Post, Glasgow, 8 Jan 1921

The endlessly prolific Wallace wrote six short stories for the "Sunday Post" featuring Archibald Dobby, "professional friend", as by "John Anstruther". They were published weekly in the newspaper under the series title "The Elusive Dud". This is the sixth and final story.

MR ARCHIBALD Dobbly found it difficult to fix the day and hour when he began to regard Jacques Richter in the light of a rival. Dob told himself a dozen times a day that he had no title whatever to May Durand's affection. It is true he had rendered her a very great service, but that debt had been cancelled when her father had sent him a cheque, which, although he was loath to receive, he could find no excuse for refusing.

Jacques Richter was of Alsatian origin, a fact that he never ceased to impress upon all and sundry. It mattered little to Dob whether he was Alsatian or dalmation. Dob's principal grievance was that he existed at all. It may be said that Jacques, Richter resented Dob's appearance in company with the girl as strenuously.

Jacques was an elegant young man of twenty-eight, who always gave the impression that he had stepped from the hands of a small army of valets. He was engaged by day in some light occupation, which did not in any way disarrange the set of his cravat or dim the lustre of his patent shoes. There were many who thought that his main occupation was the hunting of John Durand's heiress.

Dob in his turn did not take so uncharitable a view. He regarded Richter as a man of some means, and when his engagement to May Durand was announced, Dob took it for granted that her father had made the necessary inquiries into the young man's financial position. He did not realise then how dominant a personality was this high-spirited daughter of the banker, or the extent of her autocracy. It had never occurred to John Durand to oppose her slightest wish, and he had accepted Jacques Richter as he had accepted every other choice of his daughter, in the faith that she would come out on top.

It was a few days after the adventure in the alleged haunted house that Dob first saw the outward and visible signs of May Durand's engagement. It was a diamond ring of an extraordinary character. The stone was so large that upon any other hand than hers it would have appeared vulgar. It ran almost the length of the girl's finger joint, and when he saw it he gasped, He was taking tea with May Durand, and it was his good fortune that neither Mr Richter nor her father had put in an appearance.

"Yes, it is a beautiful ring. Jacques gave it to me a month ago."

"It is a beauty," agreed Dob.

"Jacques brought it from Paris," she told him calmly. "He paid a hundred thousand francs for it."

Dob smiled inwardly. It was so like May to insist on knowing the price. Or had Jacques carelessly volunteered the information?

"He is a very fortunate man," observed Dob, and she looked at him queerly.

"Do you think so! I don't think you would say that if you knew the immense responsibility which he has undertaken."

Dob coughed.

"When is this undertaking to begin?"

"When am I going to be married?" asked the practical May. "Oh, in a year, possibly sooner," and then the conversation drifted to other topics.

John Durand came in, and later Mr Richter, looking more than ever like a fashion plate. He shot a glance, which was not one of kindly welcome, at Dob, and greeted his fiancée with a certain affected ostentation.

It was during the conversation which followed that Dob learnt for the first time that the girl had met her future husband whilst travelling on the Continent.

From the vague reference Richter made to his "home," Dob gathered that he had a château on the Loire, and a family interest in other estates in France. What amazed him was the extraordinary frankness of the girl, and the absence of any mystery about their relationship.

"Mr Dobbly has been asking when I am going to married, Jacques."

"And what did you tell him?' he asked eagerly.

"I told him that it would be in a year or so," she answered, with a curious little smile, and Jacques' face fell.

"But," he stammered, "you told me— next month."

"I have changed my mind," May informed him calmly.

Was Dob's fancy playing him a trick, or did the imperturbable face of Mr Jacques Richter go a shade paler?

"But I've made all my arrangements for next month," he protested.

"And I have made all my arrangements for next year. Now, Jacques, don't let us argue on this indelicate subject before Mr Dobbly, who is young and impressionable."

Dob made his adieux soon after, and was glad to get away from an atmosphere which was rapidly becoming strained.

HE SAW Mr Richter the next morning on the train, and Jacques cut him dead. Dob was astounded more than hurt; amused rather than annoyed. When he left the railway terminus he thought he had seen the last of Jacques for the day, but in this he was mistaken. He had occasion to lunch at a big restaurant in the West End, his guest being a new client who wanted advice about some rubber shares. Dob, with the assistance of a friend, was launching forth in the direction of a financial expert.

They were half way through the meal when, glancing up, he saw on the other side of the room, two men sitting at a table, and the back of one of these was familiar to him. He could not very well mistake the perfectly cut coat, the beautifully pomaded hair, of Mr Richter. His companion was an elderly man with a grey beard and, by his gesticulations, was evidently a foreigner. He was apparently very angry, and there was a despondent curve to Mr Richter's back which rather fascinated Dob.

He observed them idly and then, turning his attention again to his client, he let the matter pass from his mind.

When his luncheon was finished the waiter came, and he paid his bill. On leaving he interrogated the head waiter.

"Who is that old gentleman over there, the fellow with the beard? A foreigner isn't he."

The head waiter glanced at the pair Dob had indicated.

"Oh, no," he replied, "he has a shop in town," and be told Dob the name.

Dob thanked him, and again the incident closed in his mind.

That evening he met May Durand on the golf course and played a round with her.

"You don't like Jacques, do you!" she asked unexpectedly.

"I don't dislike him," answered the cautious Dob, "even though he cut me dead this morning."

She laughed.

"Did he really?" she exclaimed, her eyes dancing with merriment. "How very funny!"

"It was a bit funny," admitted Dob. "I don't know what I've done to your young man."

"Don't you?" she inquired demurely.

A second later she swung at a ball and sent it flying. When they resumed their trudge she talked about something altogether different, and the name of Jacques' Richter did not arise until they were walking home from the club.

"Do you still run that absurd little office of yours?"

"I run an absurdly little office," corrected Dob with a smile.

"I mean are you still a professional friend and adviser?"

"I am indeed," said Dob. "If you want any advice out of business hours, you can have it for a little extra fee."

She looked at him again with that strange, mocking light in her eyes.

"I've a jolly good mind to ask you for advice. Suppose I came to you and asked you whether I ought to marry Jacques Richter, what would you say?"

Dob went red, then while.

"That is an unfair question," he replied quietly, "and I have an idea nobody knows how unfair it is better than you."

She was silent after that, and when he parted from her he said penitently—

"I've been rather a bore, haven't I?"

She shook her head.

"I've been rather a fool, that's all," she remarked, offering her hand.

She was not at the club the next day, nor the next. On the third day Dob was closing his office, pulling down the top of his desk, when there was a timid knock at the door.

"Come in!" he cried.

He recognised the girl who came in. She was a servant at the Durand's house, and his heart came up into his throat. Had May sent for him, he wondered? Then, something about the demeanour of the girl attracted him. Her eyes were red and her face discoloured with weeping, and when she spoke her voice was shaking.

"I hope you don't mind my coming to you Mr Dobbly," she began, "but I heard Mr Durand speak about you, and I'm so upset that I don't know what to do. I have nobody I can consult."

She was distressed, and every sentence had a sob in it.

"Now, please calm yourself, miss— I don't know your name."

"I am Alice, sir— Alice Girton."

"Well, Alice, you must not be upset. What has happened? There is nothing wrong with Miss Durand, is there?" he demanded quickly, with a sudden tightening of his heart.

"No, sir, there's nothing wrong with Miss Durand. I thought you would have heard— oh, it's dreadful, and Mr Richter has been so terribly cruel to me." At this she broke down, and it was some time before she could control her voice.

"You have got to tell me what has happened," Dob spoke kindly, "and try to think that you are talking not about yourself, but about somebody else. I can't help you unless I know."

"It's about Miss Durand's ring," sobbed the girl.

"Do you mean her engagement ring?" inquired Dob sharply.

The girl nodded.

"The big diamond one?"

She nodded again.

"Mr Durand wanted to send for you last night," she gulped, "but Mr Richter wouldn't hear of it. He said awful things about you. He called you, Dob the Dud—"

"Never mind what he called me," smiled Dob, fixing his monocle, and showing his white teeth in a grin. "I quite expect Mr Richter would say some very unpleasant things if he had the slightest provocation. Is the ring lost?"

She told him it was, and gradually the whole story came out.

"Mr Richter called last night, and I think he and Miss Durand had a little tiff, but they were all right at dinner. Miss May was wearing her ring. I saw it as I was serving the soup. Afterwards in the drawing-room, when I was handing round the coffee, she had it on her finger. A little while later I believe they had another quarrel. When I went into the drawing-room to make the fire up they were sitting at opposite ends of the room, and I saw her ring on the table. I think she must have taken it off and put it there. At any rate, she walked out of the room whilst I was there, and Mr Richter followed her. I went out soon after."

"Where did she go?" asked Dob.

"She went to Mr Durand's study. Presently I saw Mr Durand and Miss May going back to the drawing-room."

"Where was Mr Richter?"

"He had gone back to the drawing-room, and whilst I was standing in the passage he came out again very excited, and asked where was the ring."

"It had disappeared, eh?"

The girl could not speak for her tears.

"They accused me," she sobbed. "Mr Richter said dreadful things. He wanted to send for the police, and have me searched, but Miss May wouldn't allow it. I went home to my mother's— she lives in Brackton— and just as I was going, I heard Mr Richter say, 'You allow her to go out of the house without searching her. It is madness.'"

Here the interview was interrupted by a sharp ring of the telephone. Dob took up the receiver, and immediately recognised May's voice.

"Have you heard about my ring?" she inquired.

"Yes." answered Dob. "The girl has come straight to me."

"I'm awfully glad," May's pleasure was not disguised. "What do you think about it, Mr Dobbly?"

"I am thinking just as you are thinking."

"What am I thinking?" she asked.

"What I am thinking," he replied evasively.

"Will you come up and see me tonight? And please tell Alice that I don't for one moment believe she stole the ring."

Dob gave the girl the message, and it brightened her up wonderfully.

"I knew Miss May wouldn't think I was a thief. The ring must have fallen on to the floor, and it is probably under the big table in the centre of the room. Do you think Mr Richter will take any action?" he asked anxiously.

"I shouldn't think so," said Dob, but here, he was mistaken.

He opened the door for the girl, to find a stranger standing in the doorway, and behind him Mr Richter.

"Ah!" cried Jacques exultantly, "I thought you'd be here. This is the girl, inspector."

The poor girl shrank back against the indignant Dob.

"You're surely not going to arrest this girl?"

"I'm afraid I must, sir," answered the inspector. "Mr Richter has made a charge and, at any rate, I shall have to question her very closely. She can either be questioned here or at the station."

"Have you a warrant? That is my point," asked Dob impatiently.

"Well, I haven't a warrant," replied the inspector, "but I have authority to detain her."

Dob looked at Jacques Richter.

"Mr Richter, if I were you I do not think I should charge Alice."

"I am going to get my ring back," responded Richter defiantly.

"Suppose I undertake to produce the ring?"

"I don't see how you can. You weren't at the house last night."

If he thought to anger Dob he was greatly mistaken.

Dob's answer was that smile of his which had so often proved wholly infectious.

"You can't charge this girl because you've no other proof than your suspicions," he explained, "and the inspector knows that as well as I. Moreover, the ring was not your property, but if anybody's, the property of Miss May Durand, and Miss Durand is perfectly convinced that the girl is innocent."

The inspector was in a dilemma.

"Do you mind if I ask the girl a few questions?"

"Fire away," granted Dob, and for half an hour the inspector plied the girl with question on question without, however, coming any nearer to the conviction that she was guilty.

Long before he was through Mr Richter had left in disgust.

"I don't see how I can even detain the girl on this evidence, sir," said the inspector, who was from Brackton, and well known to Dob. "What were you

telling Mr Richter about finding the stone! You're not a private detective, are you?" he inquired, with a twinkle in his eye.

"I'm better than a private detective," answered Dob.

He called at the Durand's house that night, and was rather surprised to find Mr Richter present at an interview which he hoped would be confidential. For Dob had something on his mind, and was undecided as to how he should proceed.

Evidently, between the two young people the relationship remained strained. Dob was conscious of the tenseness of the atmosphere when he came into the room, and he stood uncomfortably, looking from one to the other.

"You asked me to come up, Miss Durand?"

She nodded.

"Really, May," protested Richter, white with anger, "I do think that you might keep this fellow out of the case. Surely it's sufficiently complicated without getting a Dud—"

"I hope you won't be rude to me," interrupted Dob suavely, "because to-night I want to keep my mind just rightly balanced, and nothing disturbs my mind so much as annoyance. Miss Durand, do you mind if I ask you a very intimate and almost unpardonably rude question?"

"I can't imagine you asking such a question," smiled the girl, "but I tell you that you may ask it."

"Do you love this man?" asked Dob, bluntly.

Mr Richter choked and the girl looked at him in wide-eyed astonishment.

"Really, Mr Dobbly," she began, a faint flush in her cheeks, "that is an extraordinary question to ask."

"It's the only question I can ask," went on Dob doggedly. "I hoped to be able to see you alone."

"I dare say you did," sneered Richter.

"I repeat, do you love this man?"

She thought for a moment, then looked him straight in the eyes.

"I tell you as frankly that I do not," and this time Mr Richter collapsed on to a chair.

"Then," continued Dob, a slow smile dawning on his face, "here is your ring."

He held out his hand, and the girl gasped, for between his forefinger and thumb glittered the pear-shaped diamond.

"How on earth—?" she cried.

"I borrowed it," explained Dob, speaking slowly, "from a gentleman who has the good fortune to own it."

She looked from him to the white-faced Richter.

"Did Jacques lend it to you! I don't understand."

"I borrowed it from its rightful owner, whose name is Abramovitch, a jeweller of Hatton Garden."

"Mr Richter sprang to his feet.

"I'm not going to sit here and listen to all this tommy-rot," and with no other word slammed out of the room.

The girl looked after him in amazement.

"Now, Mr Dobbly, perhaps you will tell me just what it all means," pleaded the girl, after he had gone.

"I can't tell you the whole of the story, Miss Durand, because I do not know what is Mr Richter's financial position. I gather, however, that it is a pretty rotten one, for inquiries I have made today show me that he is in debt on every hand."

"But how could he be in debt if he bought me a ring?"

"He didn't buy the ring at all," smiled Dob. "He borrowed it, or rather he bought it on approval! The ring belongs to a man named Abramovitch, and I had to give him a cheque for three thousand pounds before to allowed me to bring it away. Apparently Mr Richter, anticipating a much earlier marriage than you had decided, persuaded Abramovitch to let him have the ring, promising payment immediately after the marriage. When he found that the marriage had been postponed, Abramovitch demanded full settlement of his account. I had an interview with the old gentleman today, and he was very emphatic upon the point. He had put through inquiries as to Richter's financial position, and discovered that it was a pretty rotten one, and demanded that either the ring had to be paid for or returned.

"When you took the ring from your finger and left the room, Mr Richter had his opportunity. He pocketed the ring and, in order to take suspicion from himself, he was low-down enough to charge a perfectly innocent parlour-maid with having stolen it."

"But how did you know this?"

"I saw Richter and Abramovitch lunching together," explained Dob, "and after the ring had disappeared I put two and two together, and made a very startling four. This afternoon I interviewed the jeweller, and he told me the story."

She took the ring from her finger, upon which she had slipped it, and handed it to him.

"I am very glad I know," she said. "Why—" she hesitated, "why did you ask me whether I loved Jacques Richter?"

Dob cleared his throat.

"Because," he spoke a little huskily, "if you had loved him, I would not have exposed him, but would have given you back the ring without a word."

She dropped her eyes.

"Why?" she asked in a low voice.

"Because I love you too well to hurt you," answered Dob quietly.

She walked to the fireplace and stood looking into the flames. Presently, without turning her head, she said—

"What are you going to do with that ring?"

"I am returning it to Mr Abramovitch. He undertook to return any cheque, or to give me a portion of the money and get me a perfectly good engagement ring."

Again she was silent.

"What do you want an engagement ring for?" she inquired.

He stepped behind her, and put his arms round her waist, and her head dropped on his shoulder.

"That is the first silly question you have ever asked me," he replied softly.

14: A Carl Hertz in Disguise

Vernon Ralston
fl 1900-1921
South Western Advertiser (West Aust) 23 Nov 1910

Carl Hertz (1859-1924) was a famous American conjuror and magician, who toured Australia and New Zealand in 1896-7. Vernon Ralston, who had numerous short stories published in Australian newspapers, remains impenetrably undiscoverable at present.

SIMISTER TERRACE lies concealed somewhere in the recesses of Walham Green. To seek it out would baffle anyone save an African explorer or a County Court bailiff. It lies in an obscure corner off a by-way which apparently leads only to a mews and a laundry. There are only half-a-dozen houses in the terrace. It is a paltry place, yet it has a reputation. The tradesmen of Walham Green know it well; it is useless asking them to send goods on approval or credit to Simister Terrace. Most of them have done so once, for Simister Terrace is liberal in its orders. If a new tradesman opens a shop it is wonderful how Simister Terrace seeks to encourage him. Whether he sells bicycles, beer, bon-nets, or butter, he may be certain that Simister Terrace will absorb every farthing's worth that he can supply them with, and the interest of the tradesman's life will be heightened directly he attempts to collect his accounts.

There were only three houses tenanted in Simister Terrace. The other tenants had moved. They were commonplace folk who found life in Simister Terrace too romantic to suit them. So now the only residents were Mr. Thomson at No. 3, Mr. Arnold at No. 5, and Mr. Caskin at No. 7.

Mr. Thomson was a many-sided man. He was the International South African Stock Exchange Syndicate up five pairs of stairs in a city back street. The syndicate organised pools in mining shares for the nominal benefit of small investors. Then he was the West End Finan-cial Trust, which occupied an of-fice over a stable in the immediate vicinity of Piccadilly. The trust lent money in any sums from five to five thousand pounds— or, rather, to be perfectly accurate, we should say it charged the public inquiry fees and declined to lend the money. Then, again, this industrious man had another address at a stationer's shop. There, as Noble and Bright, he provided home employment for all who needed it; that is, he sold people a twopenny rubber stamp for a shilling, and promised them ten per cent. commission on all orders sent to him at this price.

Mr. Arnold also was a man of many parts. He was a commission agent, and changed his name whenever he had a bad week. He was a tipster, and generally, when sending out his circulars, recommended himself (under his alias for the time being) as a reliable and trustworthy commission agent. Of the lot of the people who, trusting in the knowledge of Mr. Arnold, the tipster,

invested with Mr. Arnold, the bookmaker, it is painful to speak. As for Mr. Caskin, he described himself as a general agent. He always had a good address though it changed frequently), his notepaper was always magnificent, and when he got anything on credit he could vie with anyone in the City of London in getting the best possible price for it. However, his warmest admirer could scarcely compliment him on the promptitude of his payments.

This happy trio sought relief after the toils of business in Simister Terrace. There, except for a little light practice at the expense of the local tradesmen, their predatory habits were in abeyance. They were good friends and good husbands. A wife is a necessity in these uncertain callings— if for no-thing else, just to settle the furniture on. There was no rivalry in Simister Terrace. Its inhabitants all worked together. If a writ-server hung outside the door of No. 3, Mr. Thomson climbed over the back garden walls and emerged from No. 7. Did a bailiff inquire of Mr. Thomson where Mr. Caskin lived, Mr. Thomson had no scruple in pointing out an empty house, and alleging that Mr. Caskin had just moved to Glasgow or Aberdeen. He would even oblige the functionary with the precise address.

Now one evening the three were seated playing nap when an elderly gentleman walked along the Ter-race. They all looked up when they heard his step. Visitors to Simister Terrace generally had some hostile intent.

"Ah," exclaimed Mr. Thomson, "it's the old fellow who's taken the house at the end."

"He looks well off," said Mr. Arnold.

They all eyed the passer-by more closely. From his well-cut clothes and heavy gold watch-chain one could safely argue that the newcomer was possessed of means.

"Well, let's get on with the game," said Mr. Thomson.

"No; wait a minute," returned Mr. Arnold. "Look here, I saw the two of you look at the old gent."

"Well, we'd a right to," replied Mr. Thomson sulkily.

"Now, let's be business-like," continued Mr. Arnold. "Here's an old fellow with money fallen amongst—"

"Commission agents," interrupted Mr. Thomson.

"As you like it. I was going to say bucket-shop keepers or money lenders. Well, suppose I try and nab him for myself, wouldn't you try to warn him against me? Don't say you wouldn't. You couldn't help it. Just the same if you, Thomson, tried to annex him. Wouldn't Caskin and myself give you away to him? Now, if we three get talking about one another we're done. We all know far too much. The old josser will get frightened and Button up his pockets."

"Let's form a company, exploit him together, and divide the profits. We'll all speak well of one another, all back each other up, and when we've done with him we'll divide the profits equally."

There was great interest in Simister Terrace when Mr. Clark moved in. The partners noted with satisfaction his expensive furniture and choice pictures, and wildly speculated as to the amount of his banking account. In scores of little ways did they try to oblige their new neighbour, and Mr. Clark frequently expressed his appreciation of their courtesy. As the new-comer was a bachelor and consequently a lonely man, it was only thoughtful of them to ask him in for an occasional evening. Soon he became a privileged at-tendant at the little card parties which the other residents gave.

"Don't frighten him," said Mr. Arnold. "It's much better to win moderately and regularly than to make one big haul and sicken him."

So when they, sat down to bridge Mr. Clark and his partner occasionally won a trifle; more often they lost. Usually Mr. Thomson and Mr. Clark were partners. After an average evening they would both lose £10. When Mr. Clark had gone home, Mr. Thomson had his £10 returned to him by his friends, and then Mr. Clark's £10 was equally divided amongst the three allies. The old gentleman did not seem to mind his losses, and the partners congratulated one an other on a small but certain addition to their respective incomes.

However, after a month or so a sudden turn in the luck took place. Mr. Clark and his partner began winning with unfailing regularity. It was after an evening of this kind, when Mr. Clark had gone home with £25 of the partner's money in his pocket, that Mr. Arnold turned on Mr. Thomson.

"You're playing a double game, you are!" he said suspiciously.

Mr. Thompson's face grew red with indignation. "Look here," he said, "let's drop this footling bridge and take the old gentleman on at poker. He's a bit of a gambler. I can see it in his eye. We ran all fake the cards a bit. We can arrange that he's got a good hand to gamble on, and one of us will have one just a shade better. There'll be no blessed partnership about it then— at least in the play. All play for ourselves and pool our winnings afterwards."

The suggestion was approved, and on the next evening that Mr. Clark came in Mr. Casvin said: "Look here, my dear fellow, you and Thomson are too good for us at bridge. Arnold and I can't stand the racket. Let's see if we can't do better at poker."

"As you like," said the courteous old gentleman. "Perhaps the bridge was getting a trifle monotonous."

"Any limit?" inquired Mr. Thomson.

"Oh, no," replied Mr. Caskin, ''We're all friends here, and we're not likely to go too high."

For a few minutes the game went on quietly. The stakes were fairly moderate, the luck was equally divided. Then, as Mr. Caskin dealt, he gave Mr. Arnold a slight wink. This implied that the fun was about to begin. By deft manipulation of the cards Mr. Caskin had given the old gentleman four knaves and Mr. Arnold four queens. In a minute the others stood out and a conflict of bluffing began between the old gentleman and Mr. Arnold.

"I'll raise you ten," said the old gentleman cheerfully.

"I'll raise you another ten," cried Mr. Arnold.

"Ditto," said the old gentleman. So they went on raising one an other till at last the old gentleman cried : "I'll see you!"

Proudly Mr. Arnold laid four queens on the table.

The old gentleman smiled, laid down four kings, and swept in the stakes before Mr. Arnold could even gasp.

Mr. Caskin stared at the table in horror. Had he by some awful mistake dealt out kings instead of knaves? His partners glared at him savagely.

"My deal," said Mr. Arnold sternly. Rapidly and deftly he manipulated the cards. When he had finished dealing, Mr. Thomson re joiced in the possession of three kings and the joker, whilst Mr. Clark had four queens. The other two stood out at once. Mr. Thomson and the old gentleman pro ceeded to raise one another. Mr. Thomson only ceased this interesting process when he thought that as much was at stake as the old gentleman could be expected to pay. At one stroke he would recoup all their losses and have a comfortable balance in hand.

"Four kings," said Mr. Thomson arrogantly, throwing his cards down and preparing to rake in the shekels.

"A royal flush," said Mr. Clark calmly.

Mr. Thomson nearly had a stroke.

"A very pleasant game," continued the old gentleman as he reckoned up his winnings; "a very pleasant game. I always did like poker."

"I've had enough of it!" said Thomson, glaring at his partners.

"So have I!" cried Mr. Arnold.

"Well, well, if that's the case I'd better be going. There's nothing, I say, like a hand at cards for passing an evening pleasantly."

Directly the old gentleman had left the room the three burst into mutual recriminations. Each of them accused the others of enter-ing into a secret alliance with Mr. Clark. Gradually the controversy grew so heated that Mr. Arnold took Mr. Thomson by the throat, and when they were lying on the floor in deadly struggle Mr. Caskin in an unsportsmanlike manner laid into both of them with a poker.

It was some days later— to be precise, after his black eyes had resumed their normal appearance— that Mr. Thomson dropped into a West End bar. He was detailing his woes to a sympathetic friend when who should enter but Mr. Clark.

"That's the very old josser I'm telling you about," said Mr. Thomson.

"Him!" shrieked his friend. "You've been trying your little games on him! Clark, he calls himself? Well, it may be his real name, but when he was on the halls he was Ritz, the Royal Conjurer. Why, man, he could make a pack of cards walk upstairs if he liked."

15: In The Library

W. W. Jacobs

William Wymark Jacobs, 1863-1943

Harper's Monthly Magazine, June 1901

THE FIRE had burnt low in the library, for the night was wet and warm. It was now little more than a grey shell, and looked desolate. Trayton Burleigh, still hot, rose from his armchair, and turning out one of the gas-jets, took a cigar from a box on a side-table and resumed his seat again.

The apartment, which was on the third floor at the back of the house, was a combination of library, study, and smoke-room, and was the daily despair of the old housekeeper who, with the assistance of one servant, managed the house. It was a bachelor establishment, and had been left to Trayton Burleigh and James Fletcher by a distant connection of both men some ten years before.

Trayton Burleigh sat back in his chair watching the smoke of his cigar through half-closed eyes. Occasionally he opened them a little wider and glanced round the comfortable, well-furnished room, or stared with a cold gleam of hatred at Fletcher as he sat sucking stolidly at his brier pipe. It was a comfortable room and a valuable house, half of which belonged to Trayton Burleigh; and yet he was to leave it in the morning and become a rogue and a wanderer over the face of the earth. James Fletcher had said so. James Fletcher, with the pipe still between his teeth and speaking from one corner of his mouth only, had pronounced his sentence.

"It hasn't occurred to you, I suppose," said Burleigh, speaking suddenly, "that I might refuse your terms."

"No," said Fletcher, simply.

Burleigh took a great mouthful of smoke and let it roll slowly out.

"I am to go out and leave you in possession?" he continued. "You will stay here sole proprietor of the house; you will stay at the office sole owner and representative of the firm? You are a good hand at a deal, James Fletcher."

"I am an honest man," said Fletcher, "and to raise sufficient money to make your defalcations good will not by any means leave me the gainer, as you very well know."

"There is no necessity to borrow," began Burleigh, eagerly. "We can pay the interest easily, and in course of time make the principal good without a soul being the wiser."

"That you suggested before," said Fletcher, "and my answer is the same. I will be no man's confederate in dishonesty; I will raise every penny at all costs, and save the name of the firm— and yours with it— but I will never have you darken the office again, or sit in this house after to-night."

"You won't," cried Burleigh, starting up in a frenzy of rage.

"I won't," said Fletcher. "You can choose the alternative: disgrace and penal servitude. Don't stand over me; you won't frighten me, I can assure you. Sit down."

"You have arranged so many things in your kindness," said Burleigh, slowly, resuming his seat again, "have you arranged how I am to live?"

"You have two strong hands, and health," replied Fletcher. "I will give you the two hundred pounds I mentioned, and after that you must look out for yourself. You can take it now."

He took a leather case from his breast pocket, and drew out a roll of notes. Burleigh, watching him calmly, stretched out his hand and took them from the table. Then he gave way to a sudden access of rage, and crumpling them in his hand, threw them into a corner of the room. Fletcher smoked on.

"Mrs. Marl is out?" said Burleigh, suddenly.

Fletcher nodded.

"She will be away the night," he said, slowly; "and Jane too; they have gone together somewhere, but they will be back at half-past eight in the morning."

"You are going to let me have one more breakfast in the old place, then," said Burleigh. "Half-past eight, half-past—"

He rose from his chair again. This time Fletcher took his pipe from his mouth and watched him closely. Burleigh stooped, and picking up the notes, placed them in his pocket.

"If I am to be turned adrift, it shall not be to leave you here," he said, in a thick voice.

He crossed over and shut the door; as he turned back Fletcher rose from his chair and stood confronting him. Burleigh put his hand to the wall, and drawing a small Japanese sword from its sheath of carved ivory, stepped slowly toward him.

"I give you one chance, Fletcher," he said, grimly. "You are a man of your word. Hush this up and let things be as they were before, and you are safe."

"Put that down," said Fletcher, sharply.

"By ——, I mean what I say!" cried the other.

"I mean what I said!" answered Fletcher.

He looked round at the last moment for a weapon, then he turned suddenly at a sharp sudden pain, and saw Burleigh's clenched fist nearly touching his breast-bone. The hand came away from his breast again, and something with it. It went a long way off. Trayton Burleigh suddenly went to a great distance and the room darkened. It got quite dark, and Fletcher, with an attempt to raise his hands, let them fall to his side instead, and fell in a heap to the floor.

He was so still that Burleigh could hardly realize that it was all over, and stood stupidly waiting for him to rise again. Then he took out his handkerchief as though to wipe the sword, and thinking better of it, put it back into his pocket again, and threw the weapon on to the floor.

The body of Fletcher lay where it had fallen, the white face turned up to the gas. In life he had been a commonplace-looking man, not to say vulgar; now Burleigh, with a feeling of nausea, drew back toward the door, until the body was hidden by the table, and relieved from the sight, he could think more clearly. He looked down carefully and examined his clothes and his boots. Then he crossed the room again, and with his face averted, turned out the gas. Something seemed to stir in the darkness, and with a faint cry he blundered toward the door before he had realized that it was the clock. It struck twelve.

He stood at the head of the stairs trying to recover himself; trying to think. The gas on the landing below, the stairs and the furniture, all looked so prosaic and familiar that he could not realize what had occurred. He walked slowly down and turned the light out. The darkness of the upper part of the house was now almost appalling, and in a sudden panic he ran down stairs into the lighted hall, and snatching a hat from the stand, went to the door and walked down to the gate.

Except for one window the neighbouring houses were in darkness, and the lamps shone tip a silent street. There was a little rain in the air, and the muddy road was full of pebbles. He stood at the gate trying to screw up his courage to enter the house again. Then he noticed a figure coming slowly up the road and keeping close to the palings.

The full realization of what he had done broke in upon him when he found himself turning to fly from the approach of the constable. The wet cape glistening in the lamplight, the slow, heavy step, made him tremble. Suppose the thing upstairs was not quite dead and should cry out? Suppose the constable should think it strange for him to be standing there and follow him in? He assumed a careless attitude, which did not feel careless, and as the man passed bade him good-night, and made a remark as to the weather.

Ere the sound of the other's footsteps had gone quite out of hearing, he turned and entered the house again before the sense of companionship should have quite departed. The first flight of stairs was lighted by the gas in the hall, and he went up slowly. Then he struck a match and went up steadily, past the library door, and with firm fingers turned on the gas in his bedroom and lit it. He opened the window a little way, and sitting down on his bed, tried to think.

He had got eight hours. Eight hours and two hundred pounds in small notes. He opened his safe and took out all the loose cash it contained, and

walking about the room, gathered up and placed in his pockets such articles of jewellery as he possessed.

The first horror had now to some extent passed, and was succeeded by the fear of death.

With this fear on him he sat down again and tried to think out the first moves in that game of skill of which his life was the stake. He had often read of people of hasty temper, evading the police for a time, and eventually falling into their hands for lack of the most elementary common sense. He had heard it said that they always made some stupid blunder, left behind them some damning clue. He took his revolver from a drawer and saw that it was loaded. If the worst came to the worst, he would die quickly.

Eight hours' start; two hundred odd pounds. He would take lodgings at first in some populous district, and let the hair on his face grow. When the hue-and-cry had ceased, he would go abroad and start life again. He would go out of a night and post letters to himself, or better still, postcards, which his landlady would read. Postcards from cheery friends, from a sister, from a brother. During the day he would stay in and write, as became a man who described himself as a journalist.

Or suppose he went to the sea? Who would look for him in flannels, bathing and boating with ordinary happy mortals? He sat and pondered. One might mean life, and the other death. Which?

His face burned as he thought of the responsibility of the choice. So many people went to the sea at that time of year that he would surely pass unnoticed. But at the sea one might meet acquaintances. He got up and nervously paced the room again. It was not so simple, now that it meant so much, as he had thought.

The sharp little clock on the mantel-piece rang out "one," followed immediately by the deeper note of that in the library. He thought of the clock, it seemed the only live thing in that room, and shuddered. He wondered whether the thing lying by the far side of the table heard it. He wondered—

He started and held his breath with fear. Somewhere down stairs a board creaked loudly, then another. He went to the door, and opening it a little way, but without looking out, listened. The house was so still that he could hear the ticking of the old clock in the kitchen below. He opened the door a little wider and peeped out. As he did so there was a sudden sharp outcry on the stairs, and he drew back into the room and stood trembling before he had quite realized that the noise had been made by the cat. The cry was unmistakable; but what had disturbed it?

There was silence again, and he drew near the door once more. He became certain that something was moving stealthily on the stairs. He heard the

boards creak again, and once the rails of the balustrade rattled. The silence and suspense were frightful. Suppose that the something which had been Fletcher waited for him in the darkness outside?

He fought his fears down, and opening the door, determined to see what was beyond. The light from his room streamed out on to the landing, and he peered about fearfully. Was it fancy, or did the door of Fletcher's room opposite close as he looked? Was it fancy, or did the handle of the door really turn?

In perfect silence, and watching the door as he moved, to see that nothing came out and followed him, he proceeded slowly down the dark stairs. Then his jaw fell, and he turned sick and faint again. The library door, which he distinctly remembered closing, and which, moreover, he had seen was closed when he went up stairs to his room, now stood open some four or five inches. He fancied that there was a rustling inside, but his brain refused to be certain. Then plainly and unmistakably he heard a chair pushed against the wall.

He crept to the door, hoping to pass it before the thing inside became aware of his presence. Something crept stealthily about the room. With a sudden impulse he caught the handle of the door, and, closing it violently, turned the key in the lock, and ran madly down the stairs.

A fearful cry sounded from the room, and a heavy hand beat upon the panels of the door. The house rang with the blows, but above them sounded the loud hoarse cries of human fear. Burleigh, half-way down to the hall, stopped with his hand on the balustrade and listened. The beating ceased, and a man's voice cried out loudly for God's sake to let him out.

At once Burleigh saw what had happened and what it might mean for him. He had left the hall door open after his visit to the front, and some wandering bird of the night had entered the house. No need for him to go now. No need to hide either from the hangman's rope or the felon's cell. The fool above had saved him. He turned and ran up stairs again just as the prisoner in his furious efforts to escape wrenched the handle from the door.

"Who's there?" he cried, loudly.

"Let me out!" cried a frantic voice. "For God's sake, open the door! There's something here."

"Stay where you are!" shouted Burleigh, sternly. "Stay where you are! If you come out, I'll shoot you like a dog!"

The only response was a smashing blow on the lock of the door. Burleigh raised his pistol, and aiming at the height of a man's chest, fired through the panel.

The report and the crashing of the wood made one noise, succeeded by an unearthly stillness, then the noise of a window hastily opened. Burleigh fled

hastily down the stairs, and flinging wide the hall door, shouted loudly for assistance.

It happened that a sergeant and the constable on the beat had just met in the road. They came toward the house at a run. Burleigh, with incoherent explanations, ran up stairs before them, and halted outside the library door. The prisoner was still inside, still trying to demolish the lock of the sturdy oaken door. Burleigh tried to turn the key, but the lock was too damaged to admit of its moving. The sergeant drew back, and, shoulder foremost, hurled himself at the door and burst it open.

He stumbled into the room, followed by the constable, and two shafts of light from the lanterns at their belts danced round the room. A man lurking behind the door made a dash for it, and the next instant the three men were locked together.

Burleigh, standing in the doorway, looked on coldly, reserving himself for the scene which was to follow. Except for the stumbling of the men and the sharp catch of the prisoner's breath, there was no noise. A helmet fell off and bounced and rolled along the floor. The men fell; there was a sobbing snarl and a sharp click. A tall figure rose from the floor; the other, on his knees, still held the man down. The standing figure felt in his pocket, and, striking a match, lit the gas.

The light fell on the flushed face and fair beard of the sergeant. He was bare-headed, and his hair dishevelled. Burleigh entered the room and gazed eagerly at the half-insensible man on the floor— a short, thick-set fellow with a white, dirty face and a black moustache. His lip was cut and bled down his neck. Burleigh glanced furtively at the table. The cloth had come off in the struggle, and was now in the place where he had left Fletcher.

"Hot work, sir," said the sergeant, with a smile. "It's fortunate we were handy."

The prisoner raised a heavy head and looked up with unmistakable terror in his eyes.

"All right, sir," he said, trembling, as the constable increased the pressure of his knee. "I 'ain't been in the house ten minutes altogether. By ——, I've not."

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16: Brothers

Sherwood Anderson

1876-1941

The Bookman April 1921

I AM AT MY HOUSE in the country and it is late October. It rains. Back of my house is a forest and in front there is a road and beyond that open fields. The country is one of low hills, flattening suddenly into plains. Some twenty miles away, across the flat country, lies the huge city Chicago.

On this rainy day the leaves of the trees that line the road before my window are falling like rain, the yellow, red and golden leaves fall straight down heavily. The rain beats them brutally down. They are denied a last golden flash across the sky. In October leaves should be carried away, out over the plains, in a wind. They should go dancing away.

Yesterday morning I arose at daybreak and went for a walk. There was a heavy fog and I lost myself in it. I went down into the plains and returned to the hills, and everywhere the fog was as a wall before me. Out of it trees sprang suddenly, grotesquely, as in a city street late at night people come suddenly out of the darkness into the circle of light under a street lamp. Above there was the light of day forcing itself slowly into the fog. The fog moved slowly. The tops of trees moved slowly. Under the trees the fog was dense, purple. It was like smoke lying in the streets of a factory town.

An old man came up to me in the fog. I know him well. The people here call him insane. "He is a little cracked," they say. He lives alone in a little house buried deep in the forest and has a small dog he carries always in his arms. On many mornings I have met him walking on the road and he has told me of men and women who are his brothers and sisters, his cousins, aunts, uncles, brothers-in-law. It is confusing. He cannot draw close to people near at hand so he gets hold of a name out of a newspaper and his mind plays with it. On one morning he told me he was a cousin to the man named Cox who at the time when I write is a candidate for the presidency. On another morning he told me that Caruso the singer had married a woman who was his sister-in-law. "She is my wife's sister," he said, holding the little dog close. His grey watery eyes looked appealing up to me. He wanted me to believe. "My wife was a sweet slim girl," he declared. "We lived together in a big house and in the morning walked about arm in arm. Now her sister has married Caruso the singer. He is of my family now."

As someone had told me the old man had never married, I went away wondering. One morning in early September I came upon him sitting under a tree beside a path near his house. The dog barked at me and then ran and crept into his arms. At that time the Chicago newspapers were filled with the

story of a millionaire who had got into trouble with his wife because of an intimacy with an actress. The old man told me that the actress was his sister. He is sixty years old and the actress whose story appeared in the newspapers is twenty but he spoke of their childhood together. "You would not realize it to see us now but we were poor then," he said. "It's true. We lived in a little house on the side of a hill. Once when there was a storm, the wind nearly swept our house away. How the wind blew! Our father was a carpenter and he built strong houses for other people but our own house he did not build very strong!" He shook his head sorrowfully. "My sister the actress has got into trouble. Our house is not built very strongly," he said as I went away along the path.

FOR A MONTH, two months, the Chicago newspapers, that are delivered every morning in our village, have been filled with the story of a murder. A man there has murdered his wife and there seems no reason for the deed. The tale runs something like this-

The man, who is now on trial in the courts and will no doubt be hanged, worked in a bicycle factory where he was a foreman and lived with his wife and his wife's mother in an apartment in Thirty-second Street. He loved a girl who worked in the office of the factory where he was employed. She came from a town in Iowa and when she first came to the city lived with her aunt who has since died. To the foreman, a heavy stolid looking man with grey eyes, she seemed the most beautiful woman in the world. Her desk was by a window at an angle of the factory, a sort of wing of the building, and the foreman, down in the shop had a desk by another window. He sat at his desk making out sheets containing the record of the work done by each man in his department. When he looked up he could see the girl sitting at work at her desk. The notion got into his head that she was peculiarly lovely. He did not think of trying to draw close to her or of winning her love. He looked at her as one might look at a star or across a country of low hills in October when the leaves of the trees are all red and yellow gold. "She is a pure, virginal thing," he thought vaguely. "What can she be thinking about as she sits there by the window at work."

In fancy the foreman took the girl from Iowa home with him to his apartment in Thirty-second Street and into the presence of his wife and his mother-in-law. All day in the shop and during the evening at home he carried her figure about with him in his mind. As he stood by a window in his apartment and looked out toward the Illinois Central railroad tracks and beyond the tracks to the lake, the girl was there beside him. Down below women walked in the street and in every woman he saw there was something of the Iowa girl. One woman walked as she did, another made a gesture with

her hand that reminded of her. All the women he saw except his wife and his mother-in-law were like the girl he had taken inside himself.

The two women in his own house puzzled and confused him. They became suddenly unlovely and commonplace. His wife in particular was like some strange unlovely growth that had attached itself to his body.

In the evening after the day at the factory he went home to his own place and had dinner. He had always been a silent man and when he did not talk no one minded. After dinner he with his wife went to a picture show. There were two children and his wife expected another. They came into the apartment and sat down. The climb up two flights of stairs had wearied his wife. She sat in a chair beside her mother groaning with weariness.

The mother-in-law was the soul of goodness. She took the place of a servant in the home and got no pay. When her daughter wanted to go to a picture show she waved her hand and smiled. "Go on," she said. "I don't want to go. I'd rather sit here." She got a book and sat reading. The little boy of nine awoke and cried. He wanted to sit on the po-po. The mother-in-law attended to that.

After the man and his wife came home the three people sat in silence for an hour or two before bed time. The man pretended to read a newspaper. He looked at his hands. Although he had washed them carefully grease from the bicycle frames left dark stains under the nails. He thought of the Iowa girl and of her white quick hands playing over the keys of a typewriter. He felt dirty and uncomfortable.

The girl at the factory knew the foreman had fallen in love with her and the thought excited her a little. Since her aunt's death she had gone to live in a rooming house and had nothing to do in the evening. Although the foreman meant nothing to her she could in a way use him. To her he became a symbol. Sometimes he came into the office and stood for a moment by the door. His large hands were covered with black grease. She looked at him without seeing. In his place in her imagination stood a tall slender young man. Of the foreman she saw only the grey eyes that began to burn with a strange fire. The eyes expressed eagerness, a humble and devout eagerness. In the presence of a man with such eyes she felt she need not be afraid.

She wanted a lover who would come to her with such a look in his eyes. Occasionally, perhaps once in two weeks, she stayed a little late at the office, pretending to have work that must be finished. Through the window she could see the foreman waiting. When everyone had gone she closed her desk and went into the street. At the same moment the foreman came out at the factory door.

They walked together along the street a half dozen blocks to where she got aboard her car. The factory was in a place called South Chicago and as they went along evening was coming on. The streets were lined with small unpainted frame houses and dirty faced children ran screaming in the dusty roadway. They crossed over a bridge. Two abandoned coal barges lay rotting in the stream.

He went by her side walking heavily and striving to conceal his hands. He had scrubbed them carefully before leaving the factory but they seemed to him like heavy dirty pieces of waste matter hanging at his side. Their walking together happened but a few times and during one summer. "It's hot," he said. He never spoke to her of anything but the weather. "It's hot," he said. "I think it may rain."

She dreamed of the lover who would some time come, a tall fair young man, a rich man owning houses and lands. The workingman who walked beside her had nothing to do with her conception of love. She walked with him, stayed at the office until the others had gone to walk unobserved with him because of his eyes, because of the eager thing in his eyes that was at the same time humble, that bowed down to her. In his presence there was no danger, could be no danger. He would never attempt to approach too closely, to touch her with his hands. She was safe with him.

In his apartment in the evening the man sat under the electric light with his wife and his mother-in-law. In the next room his two children were asleep. In a short time his wife would have another child. He had been with her to a picture show and in a short time they would get into bed together.

He would lie awake thinking, would hear the creaking of the springs of a bed where, in another room, his mother-in-law was crawling between the sheets. Life was too intimate. He would lie awake eager, expectant -expecting, what—

Nothing. Presently one of the children would cry. It wanted to get out of bed and sit on the po-po. Nothing strange or unusual or lovely would or could happen. Life was too close, intimate. Nothing that could happen in the apartment could in any way stir him; the things his wife might say, her occasional half-hearted outbursts of passion, the goodness of his mother-in-law who did the work of a servant without pay-

He sat in the apartment under the electric light pretending to read a newspaper-thinking. He looked at his hands. They were large, shapeless, a working-man's hands.

The figure of the girl from Iowa walked about the room. With her he went out of the apartment and walked in silence through miles of streets. It was not necessary to say words. He walked with her by a sea, along the crest of a

mountain. The night was clear and silent and the stars shone. She also was a star. It was not necessary to say words.

Her eyes were like stars and her lips were like soft hills rising out of dim, star lit plains. "She is unattainable, she is far off like the stars," he thought. "She is unattainable like the stars but unlike the stars she breathes, she lives, like myself she has being."

One evening, some six weeks ago, the man who worked as foreman in the bicycle factory killed his wife and he is now in the courts being tried for murder. Every day the newspapers are filled with the story. On the evening of the murder he had taken his wife as usual to a picture show and they started home at nine. In Thirty-second Street, at a corner near their apartment building, the figure of a man darted suddenly out of an alleyway and then darted back again. The incident may have put the idea of killing his wife into the man's head.

They got to the entrance to the apartment building and stepped into a dark hallway. Then quite suddenly and apparently without thought the man took a knife out of his pocket. "Suppose that man who darted into the alleyway had intended to kill us," he thought. Opening the knife he whirled about and struck at his wife. He struck twice, a dozen times- madly. There was a scream and his wife's body fell.

The janitor had neglected to light the gas in the lower hallway. Afterwards, the foreman, decided, that was the reason he did it, that and the fact that the dark slinking figure of a man darted out of an alleyway and then darted back again. "Surely," he told himself, "I could never have done it had the gas been lighted."

He stood in the hallway thinking. His wife was dead and with her had died her unborn child. There was a sound of doors opening in the apartments above. For several minutes nothing happened. His wife and her unborn child were dead-that was all.

He ran upstairs thinking quickly. In the darkness on the lower stairway he had put the knife back into his pocket and, as it turned out later, there was no blood on his hands or on his clothes. The knife he later washed carefully in the bathroom, when the excitement had died down a little. He told everyone the same story. "There has been a holdup," he explained. "A man came slinking out of an alleyway and followed me and my wife home. He followed us into the hallway of the building and there was no light. The janitor has neglected to light the gas." Well-there had been a struggle and in the darkness his wife had been killed. He could not tell how it had happened. "There was no light. The janitor has neglected to light the gas," he kept saying.

For a day or two they did not question him specially and he had time to get rid of the knife. He took a long walk and threw it away into the river in South Chicago where the two abandoned coal barges lay rotting under the bridge, the bridge he had crossed when on the summer evenings he walked to the street car with the girl who was virginal and pure, who was far off and unattainable, like a star and yet not like a star.

And then he was arrested and right away he confessed-told everything. He said he did not know why he killed his wife and was careful to say nothing of the girl at the office. The newspapers tried to discover the motive for the crime. They are still trying. Someone had seen him on the few evenings when he walked with the girl and she was dragged into the affair and had her picture printed in the papers. That has been annoying for her as of course she has been able to prove she had nothing to do with the man.

YESTERDAY MORNING a heavy fog lay over our village here at the edge of the city and I went for a long walk in the early morning. As I returned out of the lowlands into our hill country I met the old man whose family has so many and such strange ramifications. For a time he walked beside me holding the little dog in his arms. It was cold and the dog whined and shivered. In the fog the old man's face was indistinct. It moved slowly back and forth with the fog banks of the upper air and with the tops of trees. He spoke of the man who has killed his wife and whose name is being shouted in the pages of the city newspapers that come to our village each morning. As he walked beside me he launched into a long tale concerning a life he and his brother, who has now become a murderer, once lived together. "He is my brother," he said over and over, shaking his head. He seemed afraid I would not believe. There was a fact that must be established. "We were boys together that man and I," he began again. "You see we played together in a barn back of our father's house. Our father went away to sea in a ship. That is the way our names became confused. You understand that. We have different names, but we are brothers. We had the same father. We played together in a barn back of our father's house. For hours we lay together in the hay in the barn and it was warm there."

In the fog the slender body of the old man became like a little gnarled tree. Then it became a thing suspended in air. It swung back and forth like a body hanging on the gallows. The face beseeched me to believe the story the lips were trying to tell. In my mind everything concerning the relationship of men and women became confused, a muddle. The spirit of the man who had killed his wife came into the body of the little old man there by the roadside.

It was striving to tell me the story it would never be able to tell in the court room in the city, in the presence of the judge. The whole story of mankind's

loneliness, of the effort to reach out to unattainable beauty tried to get itself expressed from the lips of a mumbling old man, crazed with loneliness, who stood by the side of a country road on a foggy morning holding a little dog in his arms.

The arms of the old man held the dog so closely that it began to whine with pain. A sort of convulsion shook his body. The soul seemed striving to wrench itself out of the body, to fly away through the fog, down across the plain to the city, to the singer, the politician, the millionaire, the murderer, to its brothers, cousins, sisters, down in the city. The intensity of the old man's desire was terrible and in sympathy my body began to tremble. His arms tightened about the body of the little dog so that it cried with pain. I stepped forward and tore the arms away and the dog fell to the ground and lay whining. No doubt it had been injured. Perhaps ribs had been crushed. The old man stared at the dog lying at his feet as in the hallway of the apartment building the worker from the bicycle factory had stared at his dead wife. "We are brothers," he said again. "We have different names but we are brothers. Our father you understand went off to sea."

I AM SITTING in my house in the country and it rains. Before my eyes the hills fall suddenly away and there are the flat plains and beyond the plains the city. An hour ago the old man of the house in the forest went past my door and the little dog was not with him. It may be that as we talked in the fog he crushed the life out of his companion. It may be that the dog like the workman's wife and her unborn child is now dead. The leaves of the trees that line the road before my window are falling like rain-the yellow, red and golden leaves fall straight down, heavily. The rain beat them brutally down. They are denied a last golden flash across the sky. In October leaves should be carried away, out over the plains, in a wind. They should go dancing away.

17: What Was It?

Fitz-James O'Brien

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IT IS, I CONFESS, with considerable diffidence, that I approach the strange narrative which I am about to relate. The events which I purpose detailing are of so extraordinary a character that I am quite prepared to meet with an unusual amount of incredulity and scorn. I accept all such beforehand. I have, I trust, the literary courage to face unbelief. I have, after mature consideration resolved to narrate, in as simple and straightforward a manner as I can compass, some facts that passed under my observation, in the month of July last, and which, in the annals of the mysteries of physical science, are wholly unparalleled.

I live at No. —— Twenty-sixth Street, in New York. The house is in some respects a curious one. It has enjoyed for the last two years the reputation of being haunted. It is a large and stately residence, surrounded by what was once a garden, but which is now only a green enclosure used for bleaching clothes. The dry basin of what has been a fountain, and a few fruit trees ragged and unpruned, indicate that this spot in past days was a pleasant, shady retreat, filled with fruits and flowers and the sweet murmur of waters.

The house is very spacious. A hall of noble size leads to a large spiral staircase winding through its center, while the various apartments are of imposing dimensions. It was built some fifteen or twenty years since by Mr. A——, the well-known New York merchant, who five years ago threw the commercial world into convulsions by a stupendous bank fraud. Mr. A——, as everyone knows, escaped to Europe, and died not long after, of a broken heart. Almost immediately after the news of his decease reached this country and was verified, the report spread in Twenty-sixth Street that No. —— was haunted. Legal measures had dispossessed the widow of its former owner, and it was inhabited merely by a caretaker and his wife, placed there by the house agent into whose hands it had passed for the purposes of renting or sale. These people declared that they were troubled with unnatural noises. Doors were opened without any visible agency. The remnants of furniture scattered through the various rooms were, during the night, piled one upon the other by unknown hands. Invisible feet passed up and down the stairs in broad daylight, accompanied by the rustle of unseen silk dresses, and the gliding of viewless hands along the massive balusters. The caretaker and his wife declared they would live there no longer. The house agent laughed, dismissed them, and put others in their place. The noises and supernatural manifestations continued. The neighborhood caught up the story, and the house remained untenanted

for three years. Several persons negotiated for it; but, somehow, always before the bargain was closed they heard the unpleasant rumors and declined to treat any further.

It was in this state of things that my landlady, who at that time kept a boarding-house in Bleecker Street, and who wished to move further up town, conceived the bold idea of renting No. —— Twenty-sixth Street. Happening to have in her house rather a plucky and philosophical set of boarders, she laid her scheme before us, stating candidly everything she had heard respecting the ghostly qualities of the establishment to which she wished to remove us. With the exception of two timid persons,—a sea-captain and a returned Californian, who immediately gave notice that they would leave,—all of Mrs. Moffat's guests declared that they would accompany her in her chivalric incursion into the abode of spirits.

Our removal was effected in the month of May, and we were charmed with our new residence. The portion of Twenty-sixth Street where our house is situated, between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, is one of the pleasantest localities in New York. The gardens back of the houses, running down nearly to the Hudson, form, in the summer time, a perfect avenue of verdure. The air is pure and invigorating, sweeping, as it does, straight across the river from the Weehawken heights, and even the ragged garden which surrounded the house, although displaying on washing days rather too much clothesline, still gave us a piece of greensward to look at, and a cool retreat in the summer evenings, where we smoked our cigars in the dusk, and watched the fireflies flashing their dark lanterns in the long grass.

Of course we had no sooner established ourselves at No. —— than we began to expect ghosts. We absolutely awaited their advent with eagerness. Our dinner conversation was supernatural. One of the boarders, who had purchased Mrs. Crowe's *Night Side of Nature* for his own private delectation, was regarded as a public enemy by the entire household for not having bought twenty copies. The man led a life of supreme wretchedness while he was reading this volume. A system of espionage was established, of which he was the victim. If he incautiously laid the book down for an instant and left the room, it was immediately seized and read aloud in secret places to a select few. I found myself a person of immense importance, it having leaked out that I was tolerably well versed in the history of supernaturalism, and had once written a story the foundation of which was a ghost. If a table or a wainscot panel happened to warp when we were assembled in the large drawing-room, there was an instant silence, and everyone was prepared for an immediate clanking of chains and a spectral form.

After a month of psychological excitement, it was with the utmost dissatisfaction that we were forced to acknowledge that nothing in the remotest degree approaching the supernatural had manifested itself. Once the black butler asseverated that his candle had been blown out by some invisible agency while he was undressing himself for the night; but as I had more than once discovered this colored gentleman in a condition when one candle must have appeared to him like two, thought it possible that, by going a step further in his potations, he might have reversed this phenomenon, and seen no candle at all where he ought to have beheld one.

Things were in this state when an accident took place so awful and inexplicable in its character that my reason fairly reels at the bare memory of the occurrence. It was the tenth of July. After dinner was over I repaired, with my friend Dr. Hammond, to the garden to smoke my evening pipe. Independent of certain mental sympathies which existed between the Doctor and myself, we were linked together by a vice. We both smoked opium. We knew each other's secret, and respected it. We enjoyed together that wonderful expansion of thought, that marvelous intensifying of the perceptive faculties, that boundless feeling of existence when we seem to have points of contact with the whole universe,— in short, that unimaginable spiritual bliss, which I would not surrender for a throne, and which I hope you, reader, will never— never taste.

Those hours of opium happiness which the Doctor and I spent together in secret were regulated with a scientific accuracy. We did not blindly smoke the drug of paradise, and leave our dreams to chance. While smoking, we carefully steered our conversation through the brightest and calmest channels of thought. We talked of the East, and endeavored to recall the magical panorama of its glowing scenery. We criticized the most sensuous poets,— those who painted life ruddy with health, brimming with passion, happy in the possession of youth and strength and beauty. If we talked of Shakespeare's *Tempest*, we lingered over Ariel, and avoided Caliban. Like the Guebers, we turned our faces to the East, and saw only the sunny side of the world.

This skillful coloring of our train of thought produced in our subsequent visions a corresponding tone. The splendors of Arabian fairyland dyed our dreams. We paced the narrow strip of grass with the tread and port of kings. The song of the *Rana arborea*, while he clung to the bark of the ragged plum-tree, sounded like the strains of divine musicians. Houses, walls, and streets melted like rain clouds, and vistas of unimaginable glory stretched away before us. It was a rapturous companionship. We enjoyed the vast delight more perfectly because, even in our most ecstatic moments, we were conscious of

each other's presence. Our pleasures, while individual, were still twin, vibrating and moving in musical accord.

On the evening in question, the tenth of July, the Doctor and myself drifted into an unusually metaphysical mood. We lit our large meerschaums, filled with fine Turkish tobacco, in the core of which burned a little black nut of opium, that, like the nut in the fairy tale, held within its narrow limits wonders beyond the reach of kings; we paced to and fro, conversing. A strange perversity dominated the currents of our thought. They would *not* flow through the sun-lit channels into which we strove to divert them. For some unaccountable reason, they constantly diverged into dark and lonesome beds, where a continual gloom brooded. It was in vain that, after our old fashion, we flung ourselves on the shores of the East, and talked of its gay bazaars, of the splendors of the time of Haroun, of harems and golden palaces. Black afreets continually arose from the depths of our talk, and expanded, like the one the fisherman released from the copper vessel, until they blotted everything bright from our vision. Insensibly, we yielded to the occult force that swayed us, and indulged in gloomy speculation. We had talked some time upon the proneness of the human mind to mysticism, and the almost universal love of the terrible, when Hammond suddenly said to me. "What do you consider to be the greatest element of terror?"

The question puzzled me. That many things were terrible, I knew. Stumbling over a corpse in the dark; beholding, as I once did, a woman floating down a deep and rapid river, with wildly lifted arms, and awful, upturned face, uttering, as she drifted, shrieks that rent one's heart while we, spectators, stood frozen at a window which overhung the river at a height of sixty feet, unable to make the slightest effort to save her, but dumbly watching her last supreme agony and her disappearance. A shattered wreck, with no life visible, encountered floating listlessly on the ocean, is a terrible object, for it suggests a huge terror, the proportions of which are veiled. But it now struck me, for the first time, that there must be one great and ruling embodiment of fear,—a King of Terrors, to which all others must succumb. What might it be? To what train of circumstances would it owe its existence?

"I confess, Hammond," I replied to my friend, "I never considered the subject before. That there must be one Something more terrible than any other thing, I feel. I cannot attempt, however, even the most vague definition."

"I am somewhat like you, Harry," he answered. "I feel my capacity to experience a terror greater than anything yet conceived by the human mind;—something combining in fearful and unnatural amalgamation hitherto supposed incompatible elements. The calling of the voices in Brockden Brown's novel of *Wieland* is awful; so is the picture of the Dweller of the Threshold, in

Bulwer's *Zanoni*; but," he added, shaking his head gloomily, "there is something more horrible still than those."

"Look here, Hammond," I rejoined, "let us drop this kind of talk, for Heaven's sake! We shall suffer for it, depend on it."

"I don't know what's the matter with me to-night," he replied, "but my brain is running upon all sorts of weird and awful thoughts. I feel as if I could write a story like Hoffman, to-night, if I were only master of a literary style."

"Well, if we are going to be Hoffmanesque in our talk, I'm off to bed. Opium and nightmares should never be brought together. How sultry it is! Good-night, Hammond."

"Good-night, Harry. Pleasant dreams to you."

"To you, gloomy wretch, afreets, ghouls, and enchanters."

We parted, and each sought his respective chamber. I undressed quickly and got into bed, taking with me, according to my usual custom, a book, over which I generally read myself to sleep. I opened the volume as soon as I had laid my head upon the pillow, and instantly flung it to the other side of the room. It was Goudon's *History of Monsters*,— a curious French work, which I had lately imported from Paris, but which, in the state of mind I had then reached, was anything but an agreeable companion. I resolved to go to sleep at once; so, turning down my gas until nothing but a little blue point of light glimmered on the top of the tube, I composed myself to rest.

The room was in total darkness. The atom of gas that still remained alight did not illuminate a distance of three inches round the burner. I desperately drew my arm across my eyes, as if to shut out even the darkness, and tried to think of nothing. It was in vain. The confounded themes touched on by Hammond in the garden kept obtruding themselves on my brain. I battled against them. I erected ramparts of would-be blackness of intellect to keep them out. They still crowded upon me. While I was lying still as a corpse, hoping that by a perfect physical inaction I should hasten mental repose, an awful incident occurred. A Something dropped, as it seemed, from the ceiling, plumb upon my chest, and the next instant I felt two bony hands encircling my throat, endeavoring to choke me.

I am no coward, and am possessed of considerable physical strength. The suddenness of the attack, instead of stunning me, strung every nerve to its highest tension. My body acted from instinct, before my brain had time to realize the terrors of my position. In an instant I wound two muscular arms around the creature, and squeezed it, with all the strength of despair, against my chest. In a few seconds the bony hands that had fastened on my throat loosened their hold, and I was free to breathe once more. Then commenced a struggle of awful intensity. Immersed in the most profound darkness, totally

ignorant of the nature of the Thing by which I was so suddenly attacked, finding my grasp slipping every moment, by reason, it seemed to me, of the entire nakedness of my assailant, bitten with sharp teeth in the shoulder, neck, and chest, having every moment to protect my throat against a pair of sinewy, agile hands, which my utmost efforts could not confine,— these were a combination of circumstances to combat which required all the strength, skill, and courage that I possessed.

At last, after a silent, deadly, exhausting struggle, I got my assailant under by a series of incredible efforts of strength. Once pinned, with my knee on what I made out to be its chest, I knew that I was victor. I rested for a moment to breathe. I heard the creature beneath me panting in the darkness, and felt the violent throbbing of a heart. It was apparently as exhausted as I was; that was one comfort. At this moment I remembered that I usually placed under my pillow, before going to bed, a large yellow silk pocket handkerchief. I felt for it instantly; it was there. In a few seconds more I had, after a fashion, pinioned the creature's arms.

I now felt tolerably secure. There was nothing more to be done but to turn on the gas, and, having first seen what my midnight assailant was like, arouse the household. I will confess to being actuated by a certain pride in not giving the alarm before; I wished to make the capture alone and unaided.

Never losing my hold for an instant, I slipped from the bed to the floor, dragging my captive with me. I had but a few steps to make to reach the gas-burner; these I made with the greatest caution, holding the creature in a grip like a vice. At last I got within arm's length of the tiny speck of blue light which told me where the gas-burner lay. Quick as lightning I released my grasp with one hand and let on the full flood of light. Then I turned to look at my captive.

I cannot even attempt to give any definition of my sensations the instant after I turned on the gas. I suppose I must have shrieked with terror, for in less than a minute afterward my room was crowded with the inmates of the house. I shudder now as I think of that awful moment. *I saw nothing*! Yes; I had one arm firmly clasped round a breathing, panting, corporeal shape, my other hand gripped with all its strength a throat as warm, as apparently fleshy, as my own; and yet, with this living substance in my grasp, with its body pressed against my own, and all in the bright glare of a large jet of gas, I absolutely beheld nothing! Not even an outline,— a vapor!

I do not, even at this hour, realize the situation in which I found myself. I cannot recall the astounding incident thoroughly. Imagination in vain tries to compass the awful paradox.

It breathed. I felt its warm breath upon my cheek. It struggled fiercely. It had hands. They clutched me. Its skin was smooth, like my own. There it lay, pressed close up against me, solid as stone,— and yet utterly invisible!

I wonder that I did not faint or go mad on the instant. Some wonderful instinct must have sustained me; for, absolutely, in place of loosening my hold on the terrible Enigma, I seemed to gain an additional strength in my moment of horror, and tightened my grasp with such wonderful force that I felt the creature shivering with agony.

Just then Hammond entered my room at the head of the household. As soon as he beheld my face— which, I suppose, must have been an awful sight to look at— he hastened forward, crying, "Great heaven, Harry! what has happened?"

"Hammond! Hammond!" I cried, "come here. O, this is awful! I have been attacked in bed by something or other, which I have hold of; but I can't see it,— I can't see it!"

Hammond, doubtless struck by the unfeigned horror expressed in my countenance, made one or two steps forward with an anxious yet puzzled expression. A very audible titter burst from the remainder of my visitors. This suppressed laughter made me furious. To laugh at a human being in my position! It was the worst species of cruelty. *Now*, I can understand why the appearance of a man struggling violently, as it would seem, with an airy nothing, and calling for assistance against a vision, should have appeared ludicrous. *Then*, so great was my rage against the mocking crowd that had I the power I would have stricken them dead where they stood.

"Hammond! Hammond!" I cried again, despairingly, "for God's sake come to me. I can hold the— the thing but a short while longer. It is overpowering me. Help me! Help me!"

"Harry," whispered Hammond, approaching me, "you have been smoking too much opium."

"I swear to you, Hammond, that this is no vision," I answered, in the same low tone. "Don't you see how it shakes my whole frame with its struggles? If you don't believe me, convince yourself. Feel it,— touch it."

Hammond advanced and laid his hand in the spot I indicated. A wild cry of horror burst from him. He had felt it!

In a moment he had discovered somewhere in my room a long piece of cord, and was the next instant winding it and knotting it about the body of the unseen being that I clasped in my arms.

"Harry," he said, in a hoarse, agitated voice, for, though he preserved his presence of mind, he was deeply moved, "Harry, it's all safe now. You may let go, old fellow, if you're tired. The Thing can't move."

I was utterly exhausted, and I gladly loosed my hold.

Hammond stood holding the ends of the cord that bound the Invisible, twisted round his hand, while before him, self-supporting as it were, he beheld a rope laced and interlaced, and stretching tightly around a vacant space. I never saw a man look so thoroughly stricken with awe. Nevertheless his face expressed all the courage and determination which I knew him to possess. His lips, although white, were set firmly, and one could perceive at a glance that, although stricken with fear, he was not daunted.

The confusion that ensued among the guests of the house who were witnesses of this extraordinary scene between Hammond and myself,— who beheld the pantomime of binding this struggling Something,— who beheld me almost sinking from physical exhaustion when my task of jailer was over,— the confusion and terror that took possession of the bystanders, when they saw all this, was beyond description. The weaker ones fled from the apartment. The few who remained clustered near the door and could not be induced to approach Hammond and his Charge. Still incredulity broke out through their terror. They had not the courage to satisfy themselves, and yet they doubted. It was in vain that I begged of some of the men to come near and convince themselves by touch of the existence in that room of a living being which was invisible. They were incredulous, but did not dare to undeceive themselves. How could a solid, living, breathing body be invisible, they asked. My reply was this. I gave a sign to Hammond, and both of us— conquering our fearful repugnance to touch the invisible creature— lifted it from the ground, manacled as it was, and took it to my bed. Its weight was about that of a boy of fourteen.

"Now my friends," I said, as Hammond and myself held the creature suspended over the bed, "I can give you self-evident proof that here is a solid, ponderable body, which, nevertheless, you cannot see. Be good enough to watch the surface of the bed attentively."

I was astonished at my own courage in treating this strange event so calmly; but I had recovered from my first terror, and felt a sort of scientific pride in the affair, which dominated every other feeling.

The eyes of the bystanders were immediately fixed on my bed. At a given signal Hammond and I let the creature fall. There was a dull sound of a heavy body alighting on a soft mass. The timbers of the bed creaked. A deep impression marked itself distinctly on the pillow, and on the bed itself. The crowd who witnessed this gave a low cry, and rushed from the room. Hammond and I were left alone with our Mystery.

We remained silent for some time, listening to the low, irregular breathing of the creature on the bed, and watching the rustle of the bedclothes as it impotently struggled to free itself from confinement. Then Hammond spoke.

"Harry, this is awful."

"Ay, awful."

"But not unaccountable."

"Not unaccountable! What do you mean? Such a thing has never occurred since the birth of the world. I know not what to think, Hammond. God grant that I am not mad, and that this is not an insane fantasy!"

"Let us reason a little, Harry. Here is a solid body which we touch, but which we cannot see. The fact is so unusual that it strikes us with terror. Is there no parallel, though, for such a phenomenon? Take a piece of pure glass. It is tangible and transparent. A certain chemical coarseness is all that prevents its being so entirely transparent as to be totally invisible. It is not *theoretically impossible*, mind you, to make a glass which shall not reflect a single ray of light,— a glass so pure and homogeneous in its atoms that the rays from the sun will pass through it as they do through the air, refracted but not reflected. We do not see the air, and yet we feel it."

"That's all very well, Hammond, but these are inanimate substances. Glass does not breathe, air does not breathe. *This* thing has a heart that palpitates,— a will that moves it,—lungs that play, and inspire and respire."

"You forget the phenomena of which we have so often heard of late," answered the Doctor, gravely. "At the meetings called 'spirit circles,' invisible hands have been thrust into the hands of those persons round the table,— warm, fleshly hands that seemed to pulsate with mortal life."

"What? Do you think, then, that this thing is—"

"I don't know what it is," was the solemn reply; "but please the gods I will, with your assistance, thoroughly investigate it."

We watched together, smoking many pipes, all night long, by the bedside of the unearthly being that tossed and panted until it was apparently wearied out. Then we learned by the low, regular breathing that it slept.

The next morning the house was all astir. The boarders congregated on the landing outside my room, and Hammond and myself were lions. We had to answer a thousand questions as to the state of our extraordinary prisoner, for as yet not one person in the house except ourselves could be induced to set foot in the apartment.

The creature was awake. This was evidenced by the convulsive manner in which the bedclothes were moved in its efforts to escape. There was something truly terrible in beholding, as it were, those second-hand indications

of the terrible writhings and agonized struggles for liberty which themselves were invisible.

Hammond and myself had racked our brains during the long night to discover some means by which we might realize the shape and general appearance of the Enigma. As well as we could make out by passing our hands over the creature's form, its outlines and lineaments were human. There was a mouth; a round, smooth head without hair; a nose, which, however, was little elevated above the cheeks; and its hands and feet felt like those of a boy. At first we thought of placing the being on a smooth surface and tracing its outlines with chalk, as shoemakers trace the outline of the foot. This plan was given up as being of no value. Such an outline would give not the slightest idea of its conformation.

A happy thought struck me. We would take a cast of it in plaster of Paris. This would give us the solid figure, and satisfy all our wishes. But how to do it? The movements of the creature would disturb the setting of the plastic covering, and distort the mold. Another thought. Why not give it chloroform? It had respiratory organs,— that was evident by its breathing. Once reduced to a state of insensibility, we could do with it what we would. Doctor X—— was sent for; and after the worthy physician had recovered from the first shock of amazement, he proceeded to administer the chloroform. In three minutes afterward we were enabled to remove the fetters from the creature's body, and a modeler was busily engaged in covering the invisible form with the moist clay. In five minutes more we had a mold, and before evening a rough facsimile of the Mystery. It was shaped like a man— distorted, uncouth, and horrible, but still a man. It was small, not over four feet and some inches in height, and its limbs revealed a muscular development that was unparalleled. Its face surpassed in hideousness anything I had ever seen. Gustav Doré, or Callot, or Tony Johannot, never conceived anything so horrible. There is a face in one of the latter's illustrations to *Un Voyage où il vous plaira*, which somewhat approaches the countenance of this creature, but does not equal it. It was the physiognomy of what I should fancy a ghoul might be. It looked as if it was capable of feeding on human flesh.

Having satisfied our curiosity, and bound every one in the house to secrecy, it became a question what was to be done with our Enigma? It was impossible that we should keep such a horror in our house; it was equally impossible that such an awful being should be let loose upon the world. I confess that I would have gladly voted for the creature's destruction. But who would shoulder the responsibility? Who would undertake the execution of this horrible semblance of a human being? Day after day this question was deliberated gravely. The boarders all left the house. Mrs. Moffat was in despair, and threatened

Hammond and myself with all sorts of legal penalties if we did not remove the Horror. Our answer was, "We will go if you like, but we decline taking this creature with us. Remove it yourself if you please. It appeared in your house. On you the responsibility rests." To this there was, of course, no answer. Mrs. Moffat could not obtain for love or money a person who would even approach the Mystery.

The most singular part of the affair was that we were entirely ignorant of what the creature habitually fed on. Everything in the way of nutriment that we could think of was placed before it, but was never touched. It was awful to stand by, day after day, and see the clothes toss, and hear the hard breathing, and know that it was starving.

Ten, twelve days, a fortnight passed, and it still lived. The pulsations of the heart, however, were daily growing fainter, and had now nearly ceased. It was evident that the creature was dying for want of sustenance. While this terrible life-struggle was going on, I felt miserable. I could not sleep. Horrible as the creature was, it was pitiful to think of the pangs it was suffering.

At last it died. Hammond and I found it cold and stiff one morning in the bed. The heart had ceased to beat, the lungs to inspire. We hastened to bury it in the garden. It was a strange funeral, the dropping of that viewless corpse into the damp hole. The cast of its form I gave to Doctor X——, who keeps it in his museum in Tenth Street.

As I am on the eve of a long journey from which I may not return, I have drawn up this narrative of an event the most singular that has ever come to my knowledge.

18: Seen in the Mirror

A Real Ghost Story

Anonymous

London Society, Christmas Annual 1880

IT WAS OPTIONAL with me, of course, to refuse or to accept; but somehow I adopted the latter course. I suppose it was easier to write a letter of acquiescence than of apology; or possibly the latent curiosity which I had kept in check for so long had asserted itself at last, to the defeat of reason and resolution.

Three years before I had spent a week at Forrest Hall; and when I brought my stay to an abrupt conclusion, I had all but registered a mental vow that I would never repeat the experiment of a visit again. Yet Mr. Forrester, my host, had been courteous, even cordial; his wife showed herself as agreeable as a foreigner, who spoke English but imperfectly, could be; and there was no other visible inmate of the house to give umbrage or disturbance. The adjective may seem expressive; but if it is taken to imply that I suffered annoyance from nocturnal visitants of a spiritual cast, it says too much. It was not thus that my seven days' sojourn at the hall was rendered irritable and almost unendurable. But I need not pause upon a matter which will naturally unfold itself later.

It was on the eve of Christmasday that I drove beneath the ivied portal which gave entrance to the romantic old place that I had once looked upon as my own. It had belonged, a few years before, to my uncle, Mr. Geoffrey Forrester. He had never married; I was his favourite nephew; and I, though the son of his youngest brother, it had been an assumed, almost settled, thing, that I, George Forrester, was to be his heir. The disappointment in these expectations came to me before that ominous and momentous day when the will was opened. Some months before my uncle's decease, I divined that his intentions respecting the disposal of his property had varied, and that for no fault of mine, but through a sudden favour shown to another, changes were made, which were to work strangely on my after-life. The son of his eldest brother came back from a long residence in Italy, with an only and very lovely young daughter. They were naturally invited to Forrest Hall; and before the visit ended I knew that a former estrangement between the uncle and nephew was dissipated by the friendly intercourse of the present, and more especially and entirely by the fascination exercised over the old gentleman by the winning brightness and beauty of Lucia Forrester. Her mother was an Italian, and was still in her own country, while the father and daughter paid this visit of policy to the fast-failing owner of Forrest Hall. They remained with him to the last, and it was found then that, with the exception of a small bequest to myself, the whole of my uncle's property was willed to his elder nephew, in

reversion to his only child Lucia. I had met the latter, had spent a fortnight in the house with her, and had admitted that her power of attraction was deep and incontestable. I thought of her now as I was borne swiftly along the drive, and came presently in view of the old Elizabethan mansion, which was her home. Though the weather was bleak, with a piercing wind blowing on the open road without the demesne, here there was comparative shelter. My uncle Geoffrey had carried out one of his fancies to a successful issue, and had surrounded himself with the green and shade of summer when there was winter elsewhere. The whole grounds were planted thickly with evergreens which flourished almost like trees, so carefully had their growth and luxuriance been promoted; and now, at this Christmas season, outer decorations as well as inner might have been specially got up, judging from the glossy holly branches, ivy-wreaths, and laurel boughs which filled the view on all sides.

It was evening; the house was brilliantly lighted up; and as the hall-door was thrown open, the warm glow within was all the pleasanter in contrast to the frosty air and flitting moonshine which held the world in a cold spell without. Something else was more inspiriting than all. It was a sight which met my eyes in the first moment of entering. A young lady was crossing the hall, and turning, just in the doorway leading to a room opposite, she gave me a smile of welcome. She was beautifully dressed in silk of a creamy shade, with some draperies of rich violet velvet, relieving an otherwise colourless picture; for the tint of her skin and hair harmonised with that of her dress, and was scarcely deeper in tone. But there was nothing insipid in a face which beamed with expression, which had bewitchingly lovely features, and a pair of dark blue eyes, set like stars beneath the delicate pencilling of her brows.

'Lucia!' I exclaimed, and sprang forwards eagerly. 'Have we met at last?'

'Have you come at last?' she retorted quickly. 'Three invitations and three refusals speak pretty fairly for our friendship, but not for yours.'

'An invitation to a place is nothing— the people are everything,' I said.

'When I was last here you absented yourself strangely. Can you wonder I did not come again?'

This was the mere fact of the case. On the occasion of that former Christmas visit my cousin Lucia had not once shown herself. I was told she was ill, and I had felt bound to believe the statement, till it was strangely negatived by a sight which rendered me at once perplexed and indignant. I had started one day for a ride when something went wrong with the equipment of my steed, and I was obliged to return unexpectedly to the house. I was walking along the avenue of the hall, leading the horse by the bridle, when, in a pathway amongst the evergreens, I caught a glimpse of a well remembered figure. The tall slight proportions, the girlish step, and the pale amber of the

hair, which was rolled low upon the neck and rested on the glossy darkness of a sealskin jacket, were sufficient in themselves to identify the lady; but any doubt or bewilderment on the subject was at once dissipated by a full view of the face.

Miss Forrester had evidently heard the sound of advancing steps on the drive, for she turned suddenly. A rosy flush mounted to her brow at the moment; but before word or gesture could express questioning surprise on my part, she was gone. Hurrying onwards I left the horse in the care of a groom, and went at once to the house. My quick inquiry for Miss Forrester was met by the reply that the young lady was still very unwell, was confined to her room, and could see no one. Half an hour later I had left Forrest Hall, anger having predominated over the feeling of mystification which might have led me to prolong my stay in the hope of dissipating it by penetration or investigation. I felt that my cousin, who was the heiress now, was determined to arrest any incipient attentions of the former heir by showing him, in the most pointed manner, her disinclination even to tolerate his presence. It was galling enough to have to return as an impoverished guest to a place where I had once hoped to dispense hospitality, on my part, without incurring the additional humiliation of being subject to an unjust suspicion. I could see nothing else in the strange withdrawal of my cousin Lucia from my society. She plainly thought I might become too audacious as a suitor, and was determined that the inheritance I had lost should not be regained through her. This was the view of her conduct which I took at the time, and which nettled me so much that when an invitation came each succeeding Christmas to spend it at Forrest Hall I refused until the present occasion.

A little silvery laugh and a sweet bewitching glance dissipated everything but a sense of entrancement now. They had been the only reply to my inquiry, but they were sufficient to arrest the questionings of the past in the view of a less-perplexing future.

I was soon in the drawing-room, to which Lucia led the way; and amid the excitement of Christmas festivities I was greeted cordially by Mrs. Forrester and my cousin Geoffrey. My hostess was a tall thin lady, scarcely foreign-looking in appearance, as her complexion retained in a faded form the traces of a fairness almost as dazzling as her daughter's. She was still in the prime of life, but a peculiar air of feebleness was given to her aspect by the way in which she carried her head. It was always slightly on one side, was enveloped with muslin or lace ties high up about the throat, and might have been bandaged on, so nervous was its balance, and so little action was allowed to its movements. She spoke generally in italics, and emphasised her reception of me now in a way which was very gratifying.

'*So* glad to see you, Mr. Forrester! But you should have come before. Your absence was *too* bad. *Did* we offend you?'

I got out of the difficulty with a smile it was easy to summon up with Lucia close by, and ready, as I found, to give me her hand for the next dance.

That evening passed delightfully, though I was rendered a shade uneasy towards its close by the assiduity of a young gentleman, who seemed determined to give Miss Forrester the benefit of his entire stock of information. London and literature, the country and sports, all were brought eloquently forward to gain a hold on his companion's attention. He had been only introduced to the young lady that night, I learned ; but I could see at once that he was drawing the first parallel, and that, whether effectively or not, the tactics of a siege were beginning. The next day we had skating. Lucia was an adept in the art, and went skimming over the glassy surface as graceful as a swan on unruffled waters. I was out of practice, and was ploughing along in a rather laboured fashion when she flew up to me.

'Do be a little more adventurous!' she exclaimed. 'The outside edge is the easiest thing in the world. Can you not cut some figures?'

'One, as you see,' I rejoined, laughing. 'My awkwardness speaks for itself; but this singular state of things supposes anything but an advance in the plural direction.'

'You are not so very bad,' she said, with a long critical look. 'Mr. Lerrington has come to grief twice already. He offered me his hand at starting, or rather made a clutch at mine, but I managed a release.'

Mr. Lerrington was the aspiring engineer who had laid himself out to be agreeable on the preceding evening, and whose sanguine nature still kept him # up. He was beside us even as Miss Forrester spoke. ' "Acmes" are not perfection after all,' he said gaily. 'Something went wrong with mine, but I'm all right now;' and he made a successful spin. That Lucia should follow him was not a matter for surprise, but that I should be left behind was certainly one for vexation. Lucia mystified me, and therefore attracted me. I wanted to understand her, but that could scarcely be done at a distance. In the present instance I could keep my footing, though speed was beyond me; yet this plainly was the one thing desirable. Recklessness may be decried in other paths of life, but on the most slippery one of all it seems a rightful exchange for prudence, an indispensable impetus to advance.

After a while the young lady grew tired either of the exercise or the escort, and was back again with me. I am afraid I had been contemplating rashness with too favourable an eye, for I was led away by it unwarrantably now. I began to question Lucia respecting her strange disappearance from the scene on the occasion of my last visit. Breaking the ice is hazardous work, and I

certainly ought not to have attempted it here. I endangered myself, if not another. Lucia rarely flushed. Shade, rather than colour, passed into her face from the effect of emotion or annoyance. A change of the kind was noticeable as I spoke, and I tried hastily to recover my former footing. But my companion would not let me quite escape the consequences of my temerity.

'You seem to have a good memory,' she remarked. 'But I am afraid it is only for trifles. These you should forget, and not even remember that you are forgetting.'

'We are apt to estimate matters differently,' I said. 'It might be little to you to keep in a seclusion you had cause to prefer; but your absence was not exactly a trifle to another.'

'I know it was not so; but what it *should* have been is my point of view. Try to look at things in a pleasant light. It makes life easier.'

'An *effort* in that line need not be recommended now,' was my response. 'There are moments when we have to set realities before us to subdue a too seductive illusion.'

'You had better turn to the mainland then, and away from this slippery surface, if this should be one of those instants,' and with the words she was skimming off from me anew. I saw her rejoin Lerrington, but could scarcely feel jealousy, it was so evident that his society was as indifferent to her as my own. But the fact that she was unimpressionable was not reassuring, taken in conjunction with her own too strong power of fascination. I would rather she had shown susceptibility to almost any emotion than have perplexed me by her unruffled loveliness.

ii

WAS I dreaming or waking? My senses, no doubt, were in wrapt by the stillness of a frost-bound midnight; but surely they were too watchful and observant to be enchained likewise by the more potent spell of sleep! With eyes wide open I started upright on my couch. The room I had been allotted on my arrival at Forrest Hall was one hitherto unoccupied by me. But I could scarcely take exception to its comfort or position in the establishment, considering that it was the one chosen by the late master of the house, and which was known as 'uncle Geoffrey's room.' The bed, an old-fashioned one, faced a large mirror reaching from floor to ceiling and set into the wall. On the right-hand side of the 'four-poster' there was a door opening into a dressing-closet. This was always left unclosed at night; in the summer to give fuller ventilation to the sleepingapartment, which was low and somewhat gloomy, and in the winter-time to admit the subdued light and warmth from a fire that

was kindled in a wide grate in the dressing-room. Such had been the habit in my uncle's life, and I had made no change in the arrangements. Looking now into the mirror I saw a form reflected at full length. It was moving slowly across the floor in the inner closet and advancing towards the mantelpiece. There was a bright blaze from a wood fire, and the glass, being opposite to the door and my bed, gave back the clear particulars of the scene. It was a strange one; and some ghostly stories, which had been recounted for the benefit of the company by my cousin Lucia that night, came vividly to mind. The figure I was gazing at was that of my uncle Geoffrey. Clothed in a well-remembered dressing-gown of Indian pattern and gorgeous colouring, I saw his spare frame and his bent head just as I had last seen them in life. When he had gained the chimney-corner he stretched out his hand towards a huge snuff-box of tortoiseshell, which lay on the marble ledge above.

A t this moment I bounded from my couch. My own wakefulness at least was proved by the action; but it led to no further discovery. I lost sight for an instant of the mirror scene; and when I sprang through the open door of communication into the dressing-room, there was no reality here to justify the spectral appearance. The cabinet had its firelight glow and its usual air of comfort, but no occupant. The second door, which gave access to the outer corridor, was closed, and not a sound or footfall disturbed the quietude of the house. I looked around me. There was no hiding-place in the small chamber. Wherever the apparition had come from, it had sought the same shrouded precincts again. I paused in a perplexity which was not exactly fear. I saw little reason for apprehension in a warm well-lit room, which showed no token of habitation, no other possessions than my own. My coat was on a chair as I had last thrown it ; my dressing case open on the table. There was nothing to remind me of a nocturnal intruder, and I could no longer conjure up even the vision of such. I returned to rest, and sleep came later, though it vas some time ere I removed a fixed gaze from the long glass opposite the couch.

I was down early the next morning, and the first person I saw in the breakfast-room was my cousin Lucia. She had on a beautifully-made dress o f some warm ruby shade, with a bewitching little bow at the throat slumbering in lace.

'Good-morning,' she said gaily. 'You are more active than usual. Were your slumbers lighter or more profound ? There was some change, I suppose?'

'For the better, of course, since the effect is good,' I returned. 'But I fear I indulge too much in waking dreams. They are cruelly illusive.'

'Then give them up. That cannot be difficult, if you dislike them.'

'Did I say that? Some of them are only too dear, that is my objection.'

'O, the fault is in yourself, I see; not in the visions. I thought there was a reproach somewhere, but I am glad to find it is to your own person.'

'Yes, Lucia; I am guilty of a folly, no doubt. There might be a cure for it, but I don't look for it.'

'Why not? Hopefulness is a pleasant element in life. You ought to cultivate it. It might repay exertion.'

What did she mean? Had she understood me; and, speaking to a scarcely breathed longing, was I to know that she had fathomed it, and was pitiful? I might have been too daring, but the fortunate entrance of Mrs. Forrester arrested me. Her head was limply adjusted as usual, but there was no dubiousness in her manner; it was decidedly friendly.

I was apt to put in a more tardy appearance in the breakfast room, and her first questions ran therefore in the same vein as her daughter's. *Had* I slept well? The night had been *so* cold. She hoped my fire had been properly attended to? &c.

'Yes, there was a famous blaze,' I responded. 'It showed me a good deal more than the daylight brings out;' and then I mentioned the strange apparition in the dressing-room.

Mrs. Forrester gazed at me with a sort of terror in her blue eyes, and turned white as death. Lucia was perfectly composed, and even rallied me playfully on my weak surrender to the sway of Morpheus.

'I make a better fight,' she pursued, 'but acknowledge myself beaten in the end. You seem to give way at once, and revenge yourself on your opponent by a mere denial of the victory,'

'No, no; sleep is no enemy,' I interposed. 'I never struggle against it; and for that very reason, I suppose, it has less interest in visiting me. Last night, I know, it was very tardy in its advance. But I suppose you won't admit this?'

'Scarcely, with such clear evidence to the contrary. Dreams do not generally come before slumber.'

'Waking dreams may, and mine seem to be all of this order.'

The conversation dropped here. I did not press it, as I saw the same disturbed, even terrified, look in my hostess's face. She evidently believed in the possibility of an apparition, and especially in the credibility of what I had portrayed. The facts did not lessen my perplexity, but they made me resolve on attempting a solution of it by myself.

There was a change in the weather this morning. Low-lying mists wrapped the frozen waters in a warning veil, white and mournful as a shroud. Skating was pronounced unsafe, and Lerrington, with some other gentleman of the party, started on a shooting excursion. I remained at home, having still hopes that the approach of rain was more distant than appeared, and that the fog

might pass off, giving us another day's enjoyment of the ice. Lucia was too fond of the exhilarating pastime to miss it, if it could with any sense of security be managed, and I determined that if she were led into rashness it should not be alone.

Doubts or expectations, however, were at once ended when at twelve o'clock a light rain began to fall, and the wind veered full to the south. If my fair cousin could have been seen or spoken to, the long hours which succeeded would not have been so over-clouded. But she absented herself from drawing room and library during the entire morning and afternoon. I first saw her at dinner time, surrounded by the usual circle of guests, and scarcely inclined to afford me a fair share of her attention or amiability. Lerrington was on the scene, and assiduous as usual. He had come back rather cross, I thought, from his moorland trip, having had plenty of rain and little sport. He attempted to shine now, but his jests seemed damp like himself, and would not go off; and if Lucia listened to him, it was scarcely with entrancement. She was evidently bored, or pre-occupied, at all events ; and when the party broke op at an early hour, she retired with au abruptness which betrayed a secret relief at her escape from society.

I found my room warm and bright as ever, and sat reading for some time by the fire in the dressing-room. Then I left a lamp burning on a table opposite the door leading into the inner chamber, and betook myself to rest. In assuming this attitude I was far from feeling a disposition to slumber. On the contrary, I was never more wakeful in my life; but I was resolved that the apparent routine of matters should go on as on other nights, and that no marked watchfulness on my part should affright a too nervous visitant.

Time passed, midnight approached, and I remembered with a quickening of the pulse, which rose at least to expectation, that it was just at this hour that the mirror before me had reflected such a strange scene on the preceding evening. The moment was exciting. I was not superstitious. It was suspicion rather which entered my thoughts, but this kept every sense strained and acute. The night was a gloomy one, and rain had begun to fall with such weight and persistency that the thick evergreens outside no longer formed a resisting canopy, but promoted, as it were, a second shower, which maintained a ceaseless echo of that which came direct from the skies. The sobbing sound without, the stillness of my low darkly-wainscoted chamber, each had a significance of its own which was somewhat sad and portentous. I could scarcely say what I apprehended, but my memory had gone back to circumstances of a faraway past. I had heard when a boy that my cousin Geoffrey had lost himself in our uncle's good graces through his habits of wild and reckless extravagance. Having had a final quarrel with him on this head,

the nephew had gone abroad, where he managed for a time to subsist in some speculative fashion of his own. He married early an Italian lady with a fortune rather more considerable than usually falls to the lot of foreigners, and from this point in his career little more was heard of him till he returned to Forrest Hall with his daughter, a lovely girl of sixteen, and paid a visit of policy to its fast-failing owner.

A strange notion crossed my mind as I recalled these details. I felt that it was quite possible, indeed most probable, that my cousin had become involved in fresh embarrassments when he made the successful move which had gained him the Forrest Hall property. Could it be that he had tried to step more quickly into this by any false play with its late master? Had a fictitious death been managed, and was uncle Geoffrey still alive and a prisoner in some dark and mysterious way in his own house? The vision I had seen gave some colour to the thought, but it was dismissed again as a mere freak of the imagination. Such a scheme, and its accomplishment, I well knew could scarcely be a reality of days like the present.

Meditation evokes dreaminess, and in order to conquer it I took up a book which I had at hand. Just as I did so I became aware of some change in the light in the room. I raised my eyes to the mirror opposite to me, and saw that a shadowy form was crossing by the table, with the lamp on it, towards the chimney-piece in the closet. It was that of my uncle Geoffrey. Arrayed in the same flowered dressing-gown, with his head bent, and a stick in his hand, he went slowly along, and a faint groan was heard. The sound chilled my blood; it caused a sort of horror mingled with alarm which was all the more unnerving because it was in a measure indefinite. What could the scene mean? This life-like, yet ghostly, apparition, whence came it, and for what purpose?

Was it reality or illusion? Action was more to the purpose now than questionings, and the next moment I, too, was in Persian garb, and stealing across the floor of my chamber towards the outer door of this apartment. I had left it ajar, and as I gained the corridor I saw that the dressing-room door, which was close beside, was partially open as well. In a second I closed it noiselessly, turned the key in the lock, and was back again in my former quarters. As I re-entered I paused, and a creeping sensation of unknown dread paralysed further movement. The mirror was full before me, and in it the same reflection, the bowed mournful figure of my uncle Geoffrey. He was at the mantelpiece now, was stooping over it with his back turned towards me, and one hand stretched out in the act of grasping his ancient snuff-box. The lid had been raised, though it could scarcely have been with the view of putting the box to its ordinary purpose of use, for the thin fingers of the old man were placing something within the receptacle, not abstracting anything therefrom.

To turn away from the glass, to gain the inner door of communication with the dressing-room, I must necessarily lose the mirrored picture for a second, and fail to come directly upon the reality, having first to pass by the foot of the bed. This knowledge held me enchained a moment longer. Then the form, whether spirit or matter, began to glide off, and I felt that the crisis had come. I must follow it at all hazards. With a quick bound I was on the threshold of the cabinet; but an actual cry parted my lips at the instant.

The room was empty! All remained as I had left it ere I retired to rest. The lamp was burning brightly; the wood-fire was cheerful, and ruddy in its gleam as ever. Nothing ghostly or ghastly threw a lurid colouring on the quiet aspect of the scene. More bewildered, more awe-stricken than if I had beheld the phantom which had been such a vivid revelation, I could only stand and gaze. Then I approached the chimney-corner. The tortoiseshell box was on the high marble ledge above; but it was shut. It seemed hard to believe that a pallid hand had but recently been laid on it, had opened it, reclosed it Yet all this I had seen. It was no trick of the imagination. I had been wakeful, expectant. Involuntarily, half mechanically, I lifted the box, and touched the silver spring at the side. The lid flew back at the action and revealed something novel and unexpected. The interstice within was not filled with the usual contents. A small folded paper had taken their place. To withdraw it, to read it, was the work of a second. I was not dreaming before; but surely, I said to myself, there must be something of illusion now.

The writing I had perused was that of my uncle Geoffrey. It was clear and unmistakable. The well-remembered characters had a forcible peculiarity of their own, which I, for one, was not likely to forget. As I gazed upon them I had present to me, in a new vision, his aged form, his withered hand. But the substance of the paper was dreamlike in the extreme, and made me pass my hand more than once across my eyes to clear off any filmy veil of drowsiness. Here, in a few words, a bequest was made to me. Half the Forrest Hall property was mine without reserve or condition; but an express wish followed on the bequest— that I should become the husband of my cousin Lucia Forrester. The document seemed to be a codicil to my uncle's will, and I noted at once that the date was a later one than that of the testament which had been produced and proved at his death.

When sleep came to me that night I had still the paper in my hand. I knew through disturbed slumbers that I had never let it go, yet if, on awakening, I had failed to grasp it or perceive it, I could have felt little surprise. The mode of its discovery, the nature of its contents, scarcely pointed to the scenes of real life. They were more in harmony with the visions which are fleeting. But there was substance and no shadow here. The precious paper was close in my clasp,

and at its touch a thrill of delightful hope ran through me. I was no longer an impoverished man, a fortune-seeking suitor. However clear I might stand in my own sight of the latter reproach, I had needed hitherto the boldness which could defy the criticisms of others. I had it now, and no farther delay should interpose between suspense and a possible happiness.

When I saw Lucia in the breakfast-room that morning she was more bewitching, more beautiful, than ever. I was naturally followed still by a sense of mystery, and felt for the first time drawn to a belief in spiritual manifestations. In no other way could I account for the extraordinary scene of the night I said to myself that my uncle must have appeared to me to make known his will as well as his wishes; and if this were so, I was clearly called upon to carry out the latter. For reasons of my own I mentioned this second vision in the presence of my cousin Geoffrey and his wife, as well as that of the other members of the party. I gave no details, but spoke of the vividness of the apparition. Again Mrs. Forrester showed a tremour of apprehension, and a deadly pallor in her face. Geoffrey started too, and then I glanced anxiously towards Lucia. She was smiling, and maintained through all my assertions and remarks a gay incredulity.

My resolves were taken forthwith. I felt her to be guiltless of any participation in a possible conspiracy to suppress the proofs of my claim to a portion of the property; and an hour or two later I had asked her to be my wife. She had been pleasant, if a little coquettish, with me all the morning, and on the other hand had treated Lerrington with a provoking nonchalance which quickened his perceptions to recall some important engagement in town. He said good-bye, and was off from the hall by an early train.

iii

'YOU MAY make what changes in it you please, but it won't change it for me, Lucia. I will never occupy the apartment.'

We were standing in the long corridor at Forrest Hall. 'We' implies enough. She was my wife now, and thought she had a right to do anything with me. Her designs in the present instance turned fortunately towards a transformation in the house— not in its master. Yet even here I rebelled. When she proposed that uncle Geoffrey's room and dressing closet should no longer be shut up, but put to some practical use, I uttered the above protest. Though the vision seen in the apartment had pointed only to a path of brightness, still there was mystery associated with it which left a sense of awe on my mind that might be always overshadowing. The Forrest Hall mansion fell to my share in the new division of the property which had been made on the production of the codicil

to the will, and my cousin Geoffrey had gone abroad then with his wife, leaving bride and bridegroom to settle down in their home-life and happiness. 'There are rooms enough in the house,' I added now, 'to exercise your taste upon, Lucia. Those in the west wing are newer and brighter. Leave these in the peace which is a rightful enjoyment of the antiquated.'

'George, you are superstitious,' said the young bride decisively. 'It is not right to humour you in a weakness. I could never have fancied you were so silly— a believer in dreams.'

'Life is a dream, if you like,' I interposed. 'But for me there is as much reality in one episode of it which concerns the night, as in any lit up by the clearest sunshine. We may argue on this subject, but that won't alter what is conviction more than impression.'

Lucia looked pained. She did not meet me with her usual raillery, nor turn, on the other hand, to reasoning. There was something of a distinct truthfulness in her nature which shrank from letting a misapprehension lie in the mind of another which it was in her power to dispel. A minute later and I felt her hand stealing within my arm, and she was drawing me towards the closed door of uncle Geoffrey's chamber. Within its precincts, while her sweet eyes anon asked pardon for a deception and again sank in bashful confusion from my glance, I learnt a full explanation of the strange experiences of the past— of all that I had seen in the mirror.

The narration took my fair confessor back to the date of my first visit to Forrest Hall, after her father had become master of it. On the eve of my arrival, in making some arrangements in her room, she changed to come across an ornamental album, which our uncle had placed in her hands on the very day of his death. He had murmured something about a special gift to her, and that he had remembered her wishes. She thought he was wandering at the time, and, being only occupied with watchful attendance on him, she had put it away and not thought of it since. She opened the book now casually, and in doing so a paper fell from between the leaves— the very one which came finally into my possession.

What followed was told with some rapidity, indeed confusion; but I pressed for no particulars, believing without a word that, however others might have acted, Lucia herself was free from reproach. It appeared that her father had made objections to the document on the score of illegality, and had represented that it was better to put it aside, and not raise up family questionings and contentions. She had held firmly to the view that I should see it in any case, and for this purpose she kept it resolutely in her own hands. Her mother especially urged upon her to give it up; and, owing to the last clause in it, declared there would be something unmaidenly on her part in bringing it

forward. Lucia admitted that this plea embarrassed her in a measure. Still she would give no definite assurance as to her suppression of the paper; and she found then that her course of opposition to both parents was resented in an unexpected manner. She was kept a prisoner to her room during my stay; and it was only on one occasion, when I was supposed to be absent for the day, that she was allowed exercise in the grounds. She was on the point of returning to the house when I caught a glimpse of her there, and feeling that she could not well enter into explanations with me in a harried moment, she had fled in confusion.

'And later?' I said. 'How was it you were able to welcome me at my next visit?'

'I promised,' she returned, 'that I would not give you the paper— and I did not do so.'

'Who did, then?'

'No one. You found it yourself.'

'Then I am still to believe in ghostly intervention?'

'I may not assume you " a spirit, yet a woman too" V 1 As yon please,' she murmured, and then, quick and light as the words fell from her, she glided off from the mirror-room in which we were standing, and disappeared within the dressing-room. I followed her, to find her gone ; and while I gazed around me, in something of the old bewilderment, she was back with me again, having entered by the outer door from the corridor.

'What is the secret?' I said. 'If you want the rooms to be opened up, you mast throw light on them to begin with.'

'I am afraid there is not much penetration in your nature,' was the reply. 'You would make neither an inventor, nor explorer. I find out things for myself. You should be as clever.'

'I am not as inquisitive, I know.' know it, at all events,' she broke in gaily. 'If you had only examined the quaint old snuff-box in the first instance, instead of admiring yourself in the mirror, there would have been no need of a vision. But you were too stupid.'

'Too vain, I thought.'

'Both, if you like.'

'I should prefer neither, and as the imputations are so unfounded we needn't quarrel over them. You are quicker than I am, I allow. Will the concession make you complaisant?'

The touch of flattery did its work, and I was enabled to gain a confirmation of my recent surmise that it was she who had personated my uncle Geoffrey. Only one point after this remained to be cleared up; and although she amused

herself for some time in leaving the discovery of the matter to my own ingenuity, she grew reasonable presently.

Touching some hidden spring in the oak panelling beside the chimney-corner, a door flew back and she gained access to an inner chamber, which opened in its turn on the corridor. In this way she had made her escape from the dressing closet whenever she found that my watchfulness of her movements extended beyond the scene disclosed in the mirror.

'What did uncle Geoffrey mean by saying that he had remembered your wishes, Lucia?' I asked finally.

'Inquisitorial still?' she exclaimed. 'An inquiring mind that sees for itself, but does not question, is better. However, if you are dull, I suppose I must only be indulgent. I did not like injustice, sir, that was all.'

And with this admission I had to be satisfied. There was no need, indeed, to press for more. My uncle's will had been found, his wishes had been followed. What further could I ask?

End