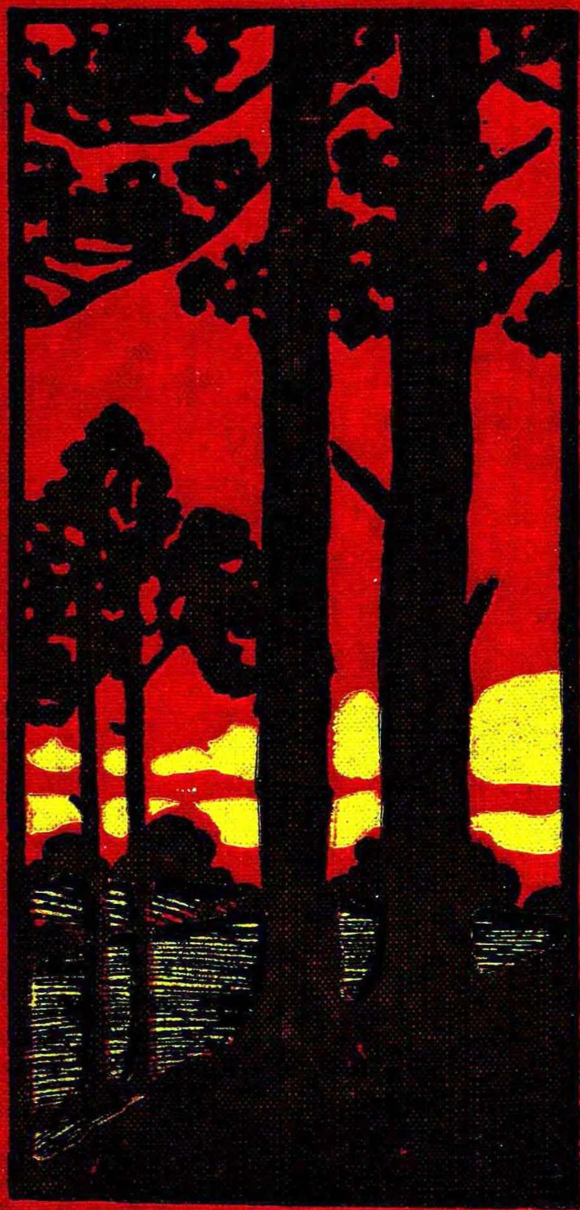
THE STORY-TELLER

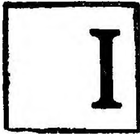


THE STORY-TELLER

Red Mist

By Sax Rohmer

"I pulled up, in full stride, as though a solid obstacle had checked me. The voice had come from ahead—at first I thought from the lips of the monk. Then I saw the latter pause, fall back, and hesitate. My mind in a turmoil, my ideas chaotic, I heard:
"'Go back! Go back—back from the mist!'"



I AM going to make a very extraordinary request, Knox," said Paul Harley.

He stared for a while at the card in his hand whilst I waited for what was to come. Then:

"Mr. John Tresmond, of Stone Lacey, Devon, is waiting outside," he continued, "and I have every reason to believe him to be a very worthy country gentleman. This is what makes the matter difficult." He fixed his keen grey eyes upon me, and: "You know I have a reason for my seemingly maddest actions, Knox," he said. "Very well—from now onwards I wish *you* to be Harley, and *I* will become Knox!"

"But, my dear Harley!" I exclaimed, "this is incredible. It is the Salterton Abbey case, is it not?"

Harley nodded.

"Following his letter," I went on rapidly, "Mr. Tresmond has come to town, and probably he wants you to go down to Devon to investigate the mystery. Do I understand you to suggest that I should take your place in this matter, that I should impersonate you? My dear fellow, firstly it would be a shocking violation of Mr. Tresmond's hospitality, and, secondly, I fear the imposture would be discovered at the very outset!"

"You are wrong, Knox. Mr. Tresmond does not know me; you and I are about the same build, both clean shaven; and in regard to your behaviour in Devon, I shall have ample time to coach you."

He strained across the table eagerly.

"Knox," he went on, "I mean it. You know what we have been discussing. You know that I am up against a big crisis in my career. Listen! Schulameyer is still in England! It is imperative that I leave London to-night."

"Schulameyer!" I cried. "Then why take up this case?"

"If I assure you that I must," he said, "will you consent? At the worst it means a week in Devon. The country is delightful, the trout fishing is good. I have no doubt that Mr. Tresmond will prove to be an excellent host; and when the ruse is discovered——" he shrugged his shoulders. "It means a lot to me, Knox."

To say that I was mystified would be inadequate, but his earnestness was unmistakable; and my time was my own for three weeks ahead.

"Very well," I said, not a little reluctantly. "I am going to be dreadfully embarrassed, but if it means helping you—why, I'll do it."

"Good!" said Harley. "You are a real pal!" He pressed a button on his table, which meant that the waiting client was to be admitted.

A moment later Mr. John Tresmond of Stone Lacey came into the

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room. A very typical English country gentleman, fresh coloured, clean-shaven and stockily built, his hair grey at the temples, and his manner possessing that direct simplicity which disarms unjust suspicion, but often leads to the undoing of crookedness, being the armour of an honest man who nevertheless is no fool. A moment he paused, looking from face to face, and:

"Mr. Paul Harley?" he inquired.

"This is Mr. Harley," said Harley, indicating myself. "My name is Knox; I sometimes assist—in a modest way!"

I felt a flush rise to my cheeks, but:

"Please sit down, Mr. Tresmond," I said, quite unable to check a reproachful glance in Harley's direction. "You are here to give us some further particulars respecting the Salterton Abbey mystery?"

"Precisely," said the visitor, seating himself in the arm-chair which I had pushed forward. "You were expecting me?"

Unseen by Mr. Tresmond, Harley nodded.

"Yes," I replied, "I was expecting you. I have read your letters with very great interest, but, if I may say so, the case appears to be rather one for a psychical specialist than for myself. I am a criminologist, you see, and the matter which has brought you to London is rather in the nature of a ghostly manifestation, I gather."

Mr. Tresmond nodded.

"It is," he admitted; "or, at least, apparently it is."

He stroked his chin reflectively, whilst I studied the man whose hospitality I was doomed to accept under false pretences.

"The legend of Salterton Abbey, as I have informed you, is that of a black-clad monk, enveloped in a cloud of flame, whose appearance presages disaster to the ruling baron—for of course the Abbey dates back to feudal times. Needless to say, there is no ruling baron to-day." He smiled almost apologetically. "But nevertheless I am, so far as I am aware, directly descended from the race which in the old days exercised undisputed sway over the lands of Stone Lacey."

Unconsciously, he was addressing his remarks rather to Harley than to me, but now he turned his frank blue eyes in my direction, and:

"You will find us in the Doomsday Book, Mr. Harley," he said; "but the modest estate which I administer to the best of my ability to-day is a shadow of that which belonged to my family at the time of the Conquest. My wife is Irish on her father's side and somewhat superstitious. I had believed myself immune from ghostly fears. I am perhaps something of a materialist. I regret to say that I pooh-poohed her story, when first she told me that she had seen the black monk and the red mist in the valley below the Abbey. This"—he pointed to an open letter lying on the table—"I have mentioned."

Harley nodded, and, recollecting my part:

"Quite so," I said hastily, "I remember."

He regarded me silently for a while, then:

"Mr. Harley," he said, "on Wednesday evening last, I, myself, from my study window in Stone Lacey, saw the black monk in the valley. He was surrounded by a red vapour!"

"An effect of the sunset," Harley interjected.

"Nothing of the kind," said Tresmond sharply. "It was a stormy night. I watched him through field-glasses from the window, pacing slowly along beside the little stream which runs through the valley. The red mist seemed to follow him. Then, in a clump of trees, he disappeared, and I saw neither the monk nor the mist any more. Now"—he squared his jaw—"I don't believe in ghosts, Mr. Harley. I have spent hours exploring that valley since I saw the apparition, but I

have discovered nothing to confirm my secret suspicions. You say you are not a psychical investigator, but a criminologist; and this is why I have come to you! Let me confess that your name was not familiar to me. I heard of you from a neighbour. But I am convinced, sir, that this thing has a material basis. It is a plot. Its end I cannot even dimly imagine. But if I am not a wealthy man, I have certain financial resources. My wife is panic-stricken—my servants threaten to leave me. I, myself, am uneasy in mind. I am here, Mr. Harley, to ask you to visit Stone Lacey and to unmask the impostor who has disturbed the peace of my household. I think the case may prove to be much more interesting than you surmise."

There was a moment's silence; then:

"I am inclined to agree with Mr. Tresmond," said Paul Harley.

I drew the curtains aside, opened the window, and leaning out, studied the moon-bathed landscape.

The quarters allotted to me were immediately above Mr. Tresmond's study, from which he had witnessed the apparition of the monk. Below me the ground fell away into the valley where the trout stream purled over its rocky course. Stone Lacey was a low, granite-built house of barrack-like appearance, although, as is often the case with these unprepossessing homesteads, delightfully comfortable as a residence. Part was of great age, but the west wing in which I was housed was modern; indeed, late Victorian. It had been added by the grandfather of my host. The room which I occupied was one not usually allotted to a guest, but since it commanded a view of the valley and of the ruins of Salterton Abbey, Tresmond's half apologetic explanation had been unnecessary.

An August moon lighted the room magically. I looked down to where the little stream in the deep valley lost its turbulence and followed almost sluggishly an S-shaped course, one loop embracing the former grounds of the Abbey, where doubtless on many a Thursday of long ago, diligent monks had fished till dusk that the refectory table might be well graced on Friday.

I could see the ruins very clearly, distance lending them an appearance of delicate black lacework. Trees cloaked the farther slope, but above them, a mysterious silhouette against the blue sky, a tor stood out to show that before Christianity had claimed this valley for its own, champions of an older faith had been laid to their rest there.

No ghostly manifestations disturbed the serenity of the night, and, reclosing the curtains, I lighted a cigarette and sat down in an arm-chair to consider my position. It was a false position to which I could not entirely reconcile myself; yet Harley's reasons for this impersonation he had made evident enough.

At this time perhaps the most famous criminologist in Europe or America, he had accepted from the Foreign Office the task of tracing one of the most brilliant and elusive criminals of modern times, Isaac Schulameyer, an international with big financial backing, whose mission was to disorganize the industries of England. He had undertaken to make the British Isles untenable for Schulameyer, and apparently he had succeeded. Then, an hour before Tresmond's visit, information had reached Harley which proved that his task remained unaccomplished. The enemy of industrial England was still in our midst. Worse, he knew the identity of the man who had undertaken his downfall.

Nevertheless, since there was nothing mercenary in Harley's disposition, the big fee offered by Mr. Tresmond for the solution of the Stone Lacey mystery could not satisfactorily account for my presence in Devon. Harley had had

some deeper motive; and this—which I resented—he had not seen fit to confide to me. I wondered how I should reconcile myself with my host when the imposture was discovered. But my belief in Harley had never been shaken, and whilst far from comfortable, I nevertheless trusted to my friend to see me through, recognizing that he must have seen in this ghostly business something of greater importance than was apparent to me.

Puffing at my cigarette, I reviewed the events of the evening since my arrival just before the dinner hour, up to the present time. I had met Mrs. Tresmond and had endeavoured to study her character as Harley would have done. Of her two sons she had lost one in the war; the other was in the Indian Cavalry. Her daughter had recently married and had gone with her husband to Canada.

Stone Lacey, I determined, had lost its charm for Mrs. Tresmond. Sweet-natured she was, and charming, but looked older than her years. The memory of those who had gone was an insupportable sadness. She heard their voices in the orchard and saw their phantom figures crossing the lawn.

A dear fellow was John Tresmond, but utterly lacking in imagination. This terror which had come unbidden had shaken the fortitude of the once light-hearted Irish woman who had lived and wrought loyally beside him in Stone Lacey, never regretting the gaiety she had left behind. But now her outlook was changed. I was conscious of the tension. Tresmond would have been well advised to shut up Stone Lacey and to set out with his wife upon a protracted tour, touching Canada in the West and India in the East. Her life had become empty and she was ill-prepared to sustain the apprehension which this traditional horror had brought to life.

It had touched the entire household. The servants were frankly panic-stricken. Indeed, I foresaw several desertions in the near future. The place was lonely, and the scanty news which I had gathered of the neighbours had done little to disabuse my mind of the idea that few visitors disturbed the lonely lives of this elderly couple.

Only one other residence was in sight from Stone Lacey, and this not from the modern wing: a queer, low-pitched Jacobean place known as the Lych House, standing upon part of John Tresmond's land and tenanted by a Mr. Degas, a retired Anglo-Indian engineer, I understood, and apparently one of the few visitors to the house. It was by him that Tresmond had been advised to consult Paul Harley; for this reason it must be my special task to avoid meeting him.

I threw my cigarette stump into the grate and began to undress. Already the West Country air had laid hold upon me: sleep was an urgent necessity. Before retiring I pulled back the curtains and opened my window widely.

My last thought, as I laid my head upon the pillow, was not of the monk and the red mist, but of a vague idea which had pursued me through the sunken lane by which, in Tresmond's car, I had been driven from the station that night, of someone, the idea was not definite, who had followed me. Indeed, before turning in, I had taken a final survey of the moon-bathed landscape, expecting to see, not the figure of a black-clad monk, but some other figure—a furtive figure—lurking under the shadows of the trees; perhaps not far off, perhaps near—watching my window.

In the morning I set out soon after breakfast, not sorry to escape for a while from my false position. Harley's instructions as to my behaviour had been fairly definite, and, so far, I thought, I had followed them closely enough. The best that could come of the whole business in my opinion was that I

should be in a position to confirm the existence of the apparition. That I should succeed in accounting for it, I regarded as a very remote possibility.

England was gasping under the visitation of a heat wave at this time, and I wore a somewhat distinctive Palm Beach suit of Harley's and a wide-brimmed soft felt hat boasting a pugaree band; a costume which I had often thought rendered my friend unduly conspicuous in warm weather.

I was counselled to avoid meeting any of the neighbours if possible—notably that Mr. Degas who presumably was acquainted with Harley. The wearing of a costume so unusual in England did not seem consistent with this policy, but that Harley was in deadly earnest I could not doubt. Therefore, hoping for the best, I set out on this blazing August morning to inspect the scene of the alleged apparition. I shall now briefly relate what befell me.

In the first place, as I turned out of the grounds of Stone Lacey into one of those sunken lanes characteristic of the neighbourhood, I immediately became aware of that same unaccountable idea of being followed.

I ascribed it to a natural fear of detection by someone in the neighbourhood acquainted with the appearance of the real Harley, and pursued my way towards the valley, in the grateful shade of overhanging trees. Mr. Tresmond had indicated what my route should be, and his wife, solicitous for my comfort, had wished to send the car to meet me at a certain point, in order that I should be back in time for luncheon. This offer I had declined, however, as it did not fall into line with certain of Harley's instructions.

At a point in the hedge where a footpath led one past heaps of boulders over a shoulder of the moorland and thence steeply down into the valley where the trout stream pursued its way, I paused and looked about me while I loaded my pipe.

A sudden sound as of stumbling footsteps brought me sharply about.

Someone, I determined, who had secretly watched my approach, was scrambling down the bank on the opposite side of the lane!

Ten seconds later I had sprung to the top and was peering through a gap in the thick hedge.

A little moor pony was galloping away like the wind!

Everywhere about me were evidences of pre-historic man—stone rings and fallen boulders. Far above on the right, the tor stood out against the almost tropical blue of the sky. Left, upon the other slope, I could see the grey front of Stone Lacey, and so clear was the air this morning that I believed I could see Mrs. Tresmond's white frock and sunbonnet as she moved about in the kitchen garden, doubtless supervising, as was her housewifely habit, the selection of vegetables for luncheon.

I pressed on, passing the boulders, and beyond them paused, looking down the steep slope patched with gorse, into the rocky valley where the stream ran. At points its course was hidden from me, but as I scrambled down, new aspects constantly opened up, so that presently, under the shadow of an outjutting rock, I became aware of the presence of a motionless figure.

Harley's instructions leapt to my mind. It was a man who stood there, but because of his position he could not possibly have seen me. Therefore I stepped aside and dropped down behind some bushes, peering out cautiously.

The distance was too great for identification, but I saw that the stranger wore a rough tweed suit and a tweed hat, the brim pulled down over his eyes. He was fishing, for, as I watched, I saw him make a throw, the sun glittering brightly upon the running reel. This set me thinking. I wondered if it could

be a coincidence that the fisherman was planted at a point I could not very well avoid passing in pursuit of my original plan; namely, to follow the stream in the direction of Salterton Abbey to the spot, closely described by Mr. Tresmond, at which the apparition traditionally appeared.

I had dropped down behind the bush to reflect upon my next move, and now, raising my head, I made a second and startling discovery.

The fisherman had vanished!

At first I could scarcely believe the evidence of my senses. I thought he must have moved down stream and be temporarily obscured from sight by one of the many upcropping boulders. It was not so, however. I crouched there for fully ten minutes, watching intently right and left; but the figure did not reappear. He had vanished as though the earth had swallowed him up.

Reviewing my mental impression of his appearance, frankly I began to wonder whether he, too, had not been an apparition. Even at the risk of meeting him—if he had ever existed outside my imagination—I determined to pursue my original course.

With this idea in mind, I got upon my knees and was about to stand up, when suddenly I paused, spellbound with astonishment.

Not twenty paces away, but below me on the slope, a man had risen as I had done, from a clump of bushes, and was peering down cautiously in the same direction as myself!

He, too, had been watching the fisherman!

Instantly I dropped back, removing my hat, and keeping my head sufficiently raised to enable me to see what this second mysterious stranger was about. In attire, he was not unlike the phantom fisherman, but nevertheless it was not he. Indeed, it was physically impossible for the other to have reached that spot unseen by me.

I had not long to wait. Taking advantage of every cover which offered, the watcher on the slope below me crept down into the valley. Moving from time to time to keep him in view, I studied his movements for fully half an hour; and that he was searching for the missing man with the rod became perfectly obvious. He moved away in the direction of Salterton Abbey, which was hidden by a clump of trees, and at last I lost sight of him.

As I stooped to pick up my broad brimmed hat I became aware of a distant rumbling. I looked back over my shoulder. So absorbed had I been by the mysterious comedy in the valley that I had failed to note both the passage of time and the coming of an ominous thundercloud, which now had cast its shadow over the farther slope, backing the tor with a grandeur of ebony banks and creeping ever onwards. Point after point became mantled, so that even as I watched, more than half the valley grew overcast.

"Oh, ah! 'e be marked down, be Squire Tresmond!" said my acquaintance, whilst thunder boomed over the inn and such torrents of rain fell as almost to drown the sing-song voice.

"Has the mist ever appeared before in your time?" I asked.

"No, no. But my gran'father 'e did remember it in 'is days, an' old Squire Roger—'im they called Red Roger—'e went to 'is long rest 'e did."

We drank in silence for awhile, then:

"I saw someone fishing in the Abbey stream about an hour ago," said I, "a tallish man wearing a tweed suit. Would that be Squire Tresmond?"

"No, no," declared the moor farmer emphatically. "Tweed suit—rough like? Oh, ah! That might 'a been—well, who might that 'a been, George?"

George, the landlord, suggested Mr. Dickinson of Tawlish East.

"Oh, ah!" my acquaintance mused; "that be likely, too. Or maybe Mr. Degas of the Lych House, or Major Openshaw of Trennerton. Ah, likely enough!"

So presently I tramped back to Stone Lacey through a countryside refreshed. The smell of damp earth was in my nostrils. The air, electrically purified, was heady as wine. I had lunched well, if roughly, at the moor inn. The storm had lasted a good two hours, and now returning I sought to arrange in my mind the facts which I had accumulated from the taciturn landlord and the more communicative moor farmer.

One thing was certain; the reappearance of the traditional ghost of Salterton Abbey was known throughout the length and breadth of the countryside, and it was accepted as a fact beyond dispute that John Tresmond's days were numbered. It was an omen which had never failed to portend disaster.

Sorrowfully this information had been imparted to me, for John Tresmond was a popular idol and his wife beloved by all who knew her.

Since I had undertaken to make a daily report to Harley, the compilation of my first presented serious difficulties, and my humour towards my friend was not of the best as I pursued my lonely way back to Stone Lacey.

As "the red mist" the thing was known, for the reason that the appearance of the monk was always preceded by a phenomenon resembling a blood red vapour trailing across the little stream winding around the Abbey grounds.

First, the mist was seen; then, sometimes but not invariably, the figure of the black-robed monk. Finally, the mist vanished.

This corresponded so closely to the statement of Tresmond that my thoughts inclined more than ever to an acceptance of the supernatural nature of the manifestation.

The eternal Shakespearean line kept time to my steps as I tramped along the hard road, but the crowning mystery, the mystery which baffled me, was that of Harley's motive in taking up a case strictly within the sphere of the Psychical Research Society.

I had plunged into the valley and was mounting the other slope towards Stone Lacey. Above me, from interlocking branches, drops of moisture sometimes fell. A dwindling rivulet pursued an irregular stony course down the lane. Then, in upon my meditations burst a sudden outside influence.

Once again I became acutely conscious of being watched.

Remembering the episode of the moor pony, I paused, listening, looking about me and wondering. Then, dramatically, the justness of my suspicions was placed beyond doubt..

Out from a gap in the hedge, where, I think, she had waited to waylay me, a woman came, wild-eyed, tumbled down the steep bank and confronted me!

She was past her first youth, but still possessed a sort of tragic beauty; dark, with sombre southern eyes, lithe and sinuous in her movements, a passionate creature who held up her hand as if to check me. She was dressed appropriately enough in a simple walking habit and wore an unadorned felt hat. But for some reason which was not clear to me at the time, I pictured her otherwise adorned.

Despite the vital animalism which glance and movement betrayed, there in that Devon lane I thought of a crowded room, of tobacco smoke and the vague smell of perfume, of stuffiness, light and laughter, bare arms and glittering jewels. It was pure intuition, no doubt. For a moment the mantle of Paul Harley had actually fallen upon me. Then the woman spoke, and I determined that she was Russian.

"Mr. Harley," she said, "stop for one moment and listen to me."

I stared at her—strangely no doubt; and:

"Give me your word," she went on

earnestly, "that you will never tell any living soul you have met me."

She spoke impetuously, passionately.

"Quick!" she urged; "promise!"

"Very well," I said, "if you wish; but what have you to say to me."

"This." She looked quickly about her: "Pack your bag, leave Stone Lacey. It is easy for you to give an excuse. There is a train at eight o'clock. Take it, I beg of you, for my sake, if not for your own. I have risked more than you know to tell you this. It means more to me and to you than you know. I beg of you, I beg of you, Mr. Harley, do as I ask."

She spoke rapidly, her great dark eyes fixed upon me, so that I was carried away by her vehemence.

"No one is in danger," she went on; "no catastrophe will come to Mr. Tresmond or anyone belonging to him. I promise you this, I give you my solemn word, I swear it. Only, go. Do not spend another night in that house."

Now, her hands were clasped together feverishly. She appealed as one whose life is at stake.

"But," I began hesitantly, "I don't even know your name, madam, although you appear to know mine."

"You are not to know it!" she cried; "you are not to know it!" and stamped her foot upon the wet gravel. "This meeting you have promised is to be secret, is to be sacred. Do I seem as one who jests? Listen to me; do as I ask. Tell me you will do as I ask."

But now, through all my embarrassment and confusion, commonsense was beginning to return, a vague recognition of errors into which I had nearly fallen, and recognition, too, of duty to my friend, for whom how blindly I had undertaken this mission.

"Madam," I said, "I am very deeply indebted to you, for I do not doubt your sincerity. But unless you will consent to tell me who you are, and in what way you can possibly be interested in my remaining at or leaving Stone Lacey, I fear I can give you no such promise."

My studied coolness had a singular and unexpected result. She clenched her hands and stared at me for a while as one who has received a death sentence, or is about to deliver it. Then:

"Very well," she said, and the tone of her voice had changed. "You fool! You poor fool!"

Suddenly she was contemptuous.

"I have done all that is in my power," she concluded, "and I bind you to your promise. No one must know that we have met."

"Madam," I replied, "no one shall ever know."

A moment longer she stared at me strangely, then turned, climbed up the bank and disappeared.

That night brought fleeting clouds to obscure the moon and a restless wind which moaned eerily around Stone Lacey. Dinner had proved a dismal business. I thought that the electrically charged air might be responsible in some measure for a nervous tension which characterized, not only my hostess and the habitually stolid Tresmond, but those of the servants with whom I came in contact.

Part of my report to Harley I had compiled before dressing; but my difficulties proved to be even greater than I had anticipated. With Tresmond I had arranged that he should watch from the study window below, whilst I made certain notes in my room above. A tired look which I had observed in his eyes had been explained by a chance remark during dinner, which had led me to suspect that latterly he had spent many hours of every night in just this fashion.

Twenty times I had all but betrayed myself—the last when I had begged permission to retire to my room to complete the report.

"Report to whom, Mr. Harley?" Tresmond had asked.

My wits had awakened in time, and:

"To Knox," was my reply. "I make it a custom to record all my impressions of a case whilst the facts are fresh in my mind."

Since this indeed was a custom of Harley's, I counted the lie a white one, and so at last reached my room, still unmasked.

The extraordinary interview with the foreign woman in the lane had upset all my preconceived theories. The legend of the red mist dated back to the days of the first crusade, when a Tresmond had done violence to a wandering friar on pilgrimage to the Abbey—in those times the resting place of holy relics. In what way could this woman, or any other human being, be concerned in my investigation of the reborn mystery?

Never possessed of a facile pen, I sat, pipe in mouth, racking my brains for adequate words, forgetful of the passage of time, oblivious of the wind moaning mournfully among the trees. "The fact that someone else was interested in the fisherman," I had written, "may have no bearing whatever on the case."

At these words I was staring, stupidly, when I heard soft but rapid footsteps in the corridor outside my room. As the door was flung open I sprang to my feet.

John Tresmond stood on the threshold, his usually florid face looking pale in the lamplight. He wore a dressing-gown over his night attire and held a pair of field-glasses in his hand.

"It's there!" he said, speaking in a hushed voice. "Thank God my wife is asleep; but the red mist is in the valley!"

Instantly I tilted the lamp-shade, crossed to the window and, drawing wide the curtain, beheld a sight which filled me with awe.

More clearly visible when the moon swam free of clouds, but dimly to be seen even in the shadows, a thin stream of red vapour poured along the valley below, following the course of the rivulet and resembling in a ghastly way, viewed from so great a distance, a trickle of blood!

I turned to face Tresmond, and, as my purpose became clear:

"You will never find your way in the dark!" he said, his suppressed tones revealing intense excitement. "I will arouse Edwards. You know why I may not join you: my wife has exacted a solemn promise. But I feel——"

"Arouse no one," I interrupted. "I know the way. I only fear I shall be too late."

"You are armed?" he asked, as I made for the door.

"Yes," I nodded, wondering why every man experiences a sense of protection, even from ghosts, when he carries a lethal weapon.

Half an hour John Tresmond gave me to reach the valley; but more nearly an hour had elapsed when at last, from a spot not twenty yards from that where I had hidden, watching the fisherman, I looked down upon the little stream.

Traces of red mist were still visible. The sky had grown more overcast, and the distant Abbey ruins were backed by angry clouds; but elfin wisps of vapour floated above the water, appearing and disappearing like marsh-lights. Nearer I crept down, and nearer; and now, as if my coming had been noted, this unnatural mist grew more dense, more red—or such was my impression.

A man is made of curious complexities. For my own part I was, frankly, more terrorised than curious; it was as Paul Harley's representative alone that I pursued the uncanny business to the end.

Then, as I crept around the boulder which had sheltered the fisherman, I saw the black monk.

It seemed to me, literally, in that moment, that my blood grew cold. All the deliberate courage which had thus far sustained me—because I acted for another and not for myself—deserted me utterly. I

watched the ominous figure pacing slowly beside the stream, not twenty yards from where I stood rooted to the ground. The red mist, in serpentine coils, floated between us.

Yet, so narrow is the dividing line between courage and panic, that, as I watched, I suddenly regained entire command of myself; that sickening supernatural dread left me; I became all at once master of my emotions.

I had seen the monk stumble!

In an instant I was running towards him, revolver in hand, heedless of the red mist as of the other apparition, now that a common accident had convinced me that I found myself in the presence of some evil imposture. For a phantasm does not stumble.

The figure turned, looking back; but the black cowl quite obscured his face from my view.

A great excitement claimed me; the thrill of the chase. I should have something more definite than I had dared to hope to report to Harley. I cried out in a loud voice. The vapour moved like red smoke over the ground almost at my feet, when:

"Stop!" came imperatively. "Stand still, Knox, for your life!"

I pulled up, in full stride, as though a solid obstacle had checked me. The voice had come from ahead—at first I thought from the lips of the monk. Then I saw the latter pause, fall back, and hesitate. My mind in a turmoil, my ideas chaotic, I heard:

"Go back! Go back--back from the mist!"

And I knew that the hidden speaker was—*Paul Harley?*

Then events moved hot-foot to a swift climax. I drew back urgently from the moving vapour which only a moment since I had been prepared to brave. I heard the moan of the wind and became aware that the breeze had changed direction.

The monk faced about, uttering an exclamation in some guttural tongue unfamiliar to me. I think he had seen Harley, although I could not see him. A moment longer he hesitated. Then he began to run towards the Abbey ruins as a shrill-voiced gust of wind came sweeping along the valley. It carried a dense cloud of red vapour right across the runner's path. He threw up his hands, stopped dead, turned —and seeming to discern the fact that the tail of the mist which lay between him and myself was less dense than elsewhere, he came racing suddenly in my direction.

"Hold him!" I heard vaguely.

Then, whipping a fold of the robe around his face as a protection, the monk turned again and plunged into the patch of vapour.

I raised my revolver.

But even as I did so, the man—his vision obscured, I suppose, by the robe—stumbled, half recovered, stumbled again, and uttering a hoarse, choking scream, fell forward into the moving clouds of smoke.

The wind howled more loudly. Serpentine coils of red mist were borne hither and thither. A tweed-clad, bearded man appeared from the undergrowth beyond the stream.

"Up the slope, Knox! Run back up the slope!"

The speaker's appearance was totally unfamiliar, but the voice was undoubtedly the voice of Harley!

Grey dawn was stealing up beyond the Abbey ruins, and I peered wonderingly into the bearded face of my companion.

"A fairly good make-up, Knox?" he said grimly. "It had to be. I was dealing with a clever man."

"But I fail to see," I began, when:

"Surely it is clear enough," Harley went on. "It came to me intuitively, not three minutes before Tresmond was shown into my office that day. I needed time to arrange my ideas. I needed free access to the scene of the mystery. And I knew, or I believed, that my appearance was unfamiliar in this district. I have been staying, as 'Mr.

Gough,' an enthusiastic mineralogist, at the 'Hare and Hounds,' Trennerton.

"So confident was I of my disguise, that I remained quite ignorant of your presence behind me, yesterday, on the moor, as I lay watching Mr. Degas fishing."

"Mr. Degas! Then *he* was the mysterious fisherman?"

Harley nodded.

"Very mysterious fisherman—since he was not trying to catch fish! Yes, had he been a superlative artist, Knox, he would *really* have baited his hook! As an old hand myself, I immediately noticed the novelty!

"Nevertheless, he tricked me. I had to return after nightfall to find out how he had disappeared. But I was successful; I discovered the *cache.* It is a partly natural and partly artificial cave-dwelling. At this end, nearer the slope, it terminates in a narrow fissure, too small for entrance or egress, but admirably adapted for the purpose of releasing the red mist."

"But what *is* this red mist?"

"The vile thing, Knox, which prompted my plan to send you down here. It is the deadly 'S Vapour,' possessed by a certain government, and named after its inventor, Dr. Isaac Schulameyer! It requires a steady, prevailing breeze for its use—hence the appearance of the apparition to-night. No fewer than fifty cylinders are stored in the cave. His several experiments have destroyed the vegetation in patches all around the neighbourhood of the fissure."

My bewilderment grew only the greater.

"But," I cried, "what was the object of all this?"

"*I* was the object!" Harley replied grimly. "Hiding down here in Devon, under an assumed identity, Schulameyer saw, in the legend of Stone Lacey, a possible instrument for my destruction. Tresmond was never in danger, Knox. His fears, and the fears of his wife, were merely used to get *me* on the scene!"

Harley stared at me. Through the unfamiliar disguise I could detect a quizzical expression which I knew of old.

"You are perhaps wondering," he went on, "about the identity of the woman who intercepted you in the lane?"

"But, Harley!" I exclaimed. "How can you possibly know——"

"My dear double," said Harley, "I overheard every word! I have been watching your lightest movement since the moment you arrived! The lady is Schulameyer's renegade companion—the ci-devant Countess Natinov."

"Good heavens! Then it means that the monk——"

"The man you saw die in such agony when the red mist touched him is the man known locally as 'Mr. Degas.' That man, Knox, was Dr. Isaac Schulameyer! At last my job is done."

SAX ROHMER.

Competition Corner

WE again make an offer of Two Prizes—one of Two Guineas and the other of One Guinea—to the competitors who send in the titles of the four stories they like best in order of merit. The prizes will be awarded to those whose cards most nearly coincide with the votes of the majority. Address: "Vote," **THE STORY-TELLER, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, E.C.4, and send in by** October 3rd, 1924.

This month we have much pleasure in awarding a prize of Two Guineas to:

MISS EDITH HARRIS, 27 Zetland Street, Poplar, E.14,

and a prize of One Guinea to:

MISS A. SOMMER, 66 King's Cross Road, London, W.C.

Horace—on Luck

By Barry Pain

" Well, sir, I ask you. Suppose I have a little more skill in my job than the other men here. Suppose that customers show their appreciation of it in the usual manner. Is that luck ? Is there any chance about that ? No. I call it by a higher name than that."

WELL, sir, if you ask me if I believe in luck you rather land me in a difficulty. I believe in bad luck more than I do in good. And lots of things are called luck that are really something different. For instance, I had the pleasure to wait on a gentleman this morning that had come in for a shave, and he said to me: "Shaved myself yesterday, Horace, and had the bad luck to gash my chin."

"You'll pardon me, sir," I said, "but that was not bad luck: that was your clumsiness. If I were to cut you now that would be my clumsiness and your bad luck."

"I'll take your word for it, Horace," he said. "You needn't illustrate it."

Unfortunately he spoke too late. It was the slightest possible scratch, and a thing that don't happen with me once in five years. But still, there it was.

But, of course, there is real bad luck, and some seem born to it. Same as my cousin Arthur. He was away on a seaside holiday once and he lost three things in one day. In the morning the wind put his new straw hat under the wheel of a lorry. In the afternoon he was sorting out his silver from his copper to prevent accidents, and dropped half a crown down a road grating. And that same night he lost his wife from double pneumatics. Women with weak chests can't stand the English summer.

Terrible loss? Well, no, sir. I shouldn't call it that. I never speak ill of the dead, but that woman was nothing to look at, no housekeeper, a bad mother, and nagged him from morning to night. More like a merciful release as far as that went. No; the bad luck came in her dying when he was on his holiday. No tact about it. If she'd died when he was at work on his job he'd have got three days off for it.

The governor was talking to me this morning, groaning and bemoaning as usual. "Horace," he says, "you're a lucky man. I believe you make more out of this place than ever I do. You've got no rent, rates, taxes and salaries weighing on you. All you do is to keep on taking it in from morning to night."

Well, sir, I ask you. Suppose I have a little more skill in my job than the other men here. Suppose that customers show their appreciation of it in the usual manner. Is that luck? Is there any chance about that? No. I call it by a higher name than that.

Thank you, sir. Thank you very much. I'm sure I hope you didn't think that I was leading up to anything.

BARRY PAIN.

✕ Miss Jedburys

By Frank Swinnerton

" Miss Nelly laughed scornfully.

" ' He's forgotten both of us,' she said. ' He was just as fond of me.'

" The words fell like stones in the silence, as any other unconvincing lie drops in its exposed nakedness to the ground.

" ' No, he wasn't,' at last slowly answered Miss Harriet. ' It was me he was fondest of. He wouldn't let you touch his wasp sting. He wouldn't let you put him to bed. It was me he loved. He said good-bye to me . . .' "

STRICT grammarians would call them the Misses Jedbury, but they are known in the village as Miss Jedburys. They always have been Miss Harriet and Miss Nelly, and they remain Miss Harriet and Miss Nelly. Nobody in the village now knows whether any attempt was ever made to persuade either to become anybody else. There may have been romances, hints, fears, bitter disappointments for Miss Jedburys, but if so these are long forgotten, and the sisters have been all their lives single in Marshmeadow, and look as though they would die there, still Miss Jedburys. They live upon the fringe of the village, in a cottage which was once two cottages. It is red-tiled and weather-boarded, and the boards are painted a sort of putty grey colour, which is now rather faded. The cottage lies a long way back from the road, and each half of it is like a reflection of the other half. In front of it is a long, wide garden, without flowers, filled with rows and rows of vegetables set across its width, and interrupted here and there by gnarled old fruit trees. A plain wooden paling, also painted grey to match the cottage, separates the garden from the village street, and a straight, brick-paved pathway runs from the two front doors of the cottage, which are generally open, down to a small gate in the paling. The cottage has four rooms, two twins upstairs and two down, and behind it are two very tiny sculleries, still divided, although a single glass roof, with its panes whitewashed, covers both and shelters them alike from sun and rain. Behind all this, apart from some sheds, are two or three acres which are used as pasture.

Miss Jedburys were not born in this cottage. They were born fifty years ago, and more, in a cottage that no longer exists. It fell down some years ago, after it had been condemned by the inspectors of rural dwellings. Its ruins have been thriftily used for other purposes. Its site is still known as "Ole Tom Jedbury's." Tom Jedbury was the father of Miss Jedburys, and both he and his wife are buried and half forgotten. Old Tom Jedbury was a builder. He bought land outside the village, and built several houses in the neighbourhood; but he never lived in a house of his own building, because he was thrifty: sold at a profit when prices were high, and bought at a profit when prices were low. That is why at his death Miss Jedburys were able to live in their charming red-tiled cottage with the grey weather-boarding, and eat the vegetables which grew in their own garden, and draw rents from others which made them wealthy upon a hundred pounds a year. Miss Jedburys were respected. They were not gentry, but they were independent. They employed a man to do the rough work of the garden, and a woman to do the rough work of the house. Otherwise they did everything for themselves, sat in black silk on Sunday afternoons,

and were able to save in a year nearly as much as they spent.

It is a curious thing that Miss Harriet closely resembled her father, and Miss Nelly her mother, not only in feature, but in character. The facts were well known in the village, where Miss Nelly was much liked and Miss Harriet slightly feared. Old Tom Jedbury had been a sturdy fellow with broad shoulders, a dusty coat, a cocked hat, and a brass watch-chain. He had stood with his feet apart, and he had talked (when he spoke at all, which was not often) in a thick peremptory voice, raising a short plump forefinger to emphasize his remarks. Mrs. Jedbury, upon the other hand, had been a quiet, determined little woman, whose tongue was active only when she was exasperated. Otherwise she was placid, brisk, and a good housewife. Not very many people had ever seen a quarrel between Mr. and Mrs. Jedbury. At any disagreement Mr. Jedbury cleared his throat and raised his forefinger, and then cleared his throat again and allowed his nose and face to twitch. But he did not use his thick peremptory voice. He kept that for his labourers or for the people who fell behind with their rent. His silence in face of his wife was therefore full of interest for the villagers. With raised brows and significant glances, they waited until later before commenting upon the subject of the disagreement. It seemed to them that Mr. Jedbury at one time had received some sort of melancholy rebuff, and that he remembered the rebuff very well for the remainder of his life. This, of course, was all long ago when Old Tom Jedbury and his wife were still alive. They had been dead very nearly fifteen years. Miss Harriet closely resembled her father, and Miss Nelly her mother, not only in feature, but in character.

II

Both Miss Jedburys could cook, but Miss Nelly as a rule prepared the meals. Miss Harriet, who was a year older than Miss Nelly, worked in the garden and kept the house clean and tidy. She thus had the supervision of George, the garden help, and Mrs. Wright, who helped in the house. She was fierce with them. With Miss Nelly she was not fierce, although she frowned at her, and shot little glances from under her dark brows. Miss Harriet was thin, rather tall, very neat in her dress. Her face was grey, her eyes black, and her mouth went down at the corners. In each of her cheeks was a long crease. Her hands were long and bony, and she sometimes wore a small dark red shawl across her shoulders because she felt the cold. She looked something like a witch with tidy hair, and held herself very erect. Miss Nelly, on the other hand, was plumper, not quite as tall, and had very grey eyes which were somehow like those of a cat. It may have been that her broad cheek-bones and snubbly nose gave Miss Nelly that appearance. Her hair was a soft mouse-brown, and she had a little smile for everybody. Nevertheless, in spite of this smile, Miss Nelly was never cheated. No milkman or baker or draper would have thought of giving her short measure or short weight. There is that in some human beings which keeps those who deal with them quite honest. Miss Nelly had it. Whereas George resumed his work with a scowl after reproof from Miss Harriet, and soon forgot his trouble, he always kept half an eye warily upon Miss Nelly when she walked in the garden. Just so does the chicken feel anxiety at the neighbourhood of a hawk. As for Mrs. Wright, she adored both Miss Jedburys. She said in the village that you couldn't ask to work for a nicer pair of women in all England. She felt equally at ease with either of them, and for Mrs. Wright the fierceness of Miss Harriet and the quiet mildness of Miss Nelly were alike tolerable, and even occasion for hearty liking. The reason she and George did not

see eye to eye about Miss Jedburys was that George was a man and Mrs. Wright was a woman. Men are always nervous of women of any character. They believe them to have eyes in the backs of their heads, and a mysterious knowledge of all things, such as pipes thrust burning into trousers pockets and small packages taken away at the close of the afternoon. . . .

III

One morning a remarkable thing happened to Miss Jedburys. They received a letter with the London postmark. Now Wilson, the village postman, knew all the handwritings in the world (the world, that is, of Marshmeadow), and when he saw the envelope for Miss Jedburys that morning he scratched his head in bewilderment. For the handwriting was unknown to him. More, it was unlike any handwriting that he remembered to have seen in the village during all his thirty years of service. If the letter had been a postcard he would have mastered the mystery at once, but it was a letter, which revealed no secrets even after a dozen turns and dexterous pressures. So Wilson was forced to knock at Miss Jedburys' door, and, as neither Miss Harriet nor Miss Nelly was in the house, to leave the letter upon the sitting-room table without learning its contents. The secret of these for the present was to lie with Miss Jedburys. They read the letter together. It said:

"Dear Harriet and Nelly,—I hope you are both well. I am well, but in great trouble, dear Harriet and Nelly, for Geraldine and Poppy are both ill with the scarlet fever, and I am afraid for my little Jimmy. He has been away and has not caught it, but his granny—Harry's mother—is an old woman over seventy, and he is asking to come home as he is not happy there. He has nothing to do but to sit in her two rooms; no garden or other children or anything to amuse the poor dear. Dear Harriet and Nelly, for the sake of old times I am wondering if it is asking you too much to ask you to take care of him till I get the two others quite well. There is no risk, I assure you. He has been with his granny from the first and is a good boy, and I shall disinfect this letter before I send it. But if you could help me I should never forget it. Do please help me. —Your affectionate cousin,

"Emily Danvers."

Miss Jedburys read the whole of this letter through, and Miss Harriet, laying it upon the window-ledge, instinctively wiped her hand upon her skirt and then dusted the skirt freely with the same hand, so as to dislodge any clinging scarlet-fever germs. It had been Miss Harriet who had opened the letter, and who had been holding it until now.

"Well!" exclaimed Miss Nelly, breathlessly. "What sauce!" An added pink was in her cheeks. Her eyes sparkled.

"What impudence!" added Miss Harriet, in a very serious voice. "Emmy always had it. Always——"

There was a long pause. Miss Harriet cleared her throat and folded her arms grimly. It was clear that she had been surprised, and that she felt indignant—indignant enough to remain indignant for the whole morning, if need be. Her mouth turned down still more at the corners. The creases in her grey cheeks were very pronounced. She seemed immovable. Her very immovability exasperated her sister.

"Yes, but what we goin' to *do?*" asked Miss Nelly. "See, he can't be more'n five or six, I shouldn't think. . . . Child like that. . . . He can't, not if. . . . How long's she been married? Fifteen years? I know there's four years' difference."

"Must be." Miss Harriet spoke in a resolute groan.

"Well, but what we goin' to *do?*"

again asked Miss Nelly. "The child can't go back there, that's certain."

"She never ought to of had him." Miss Harriet was fixed in her pessimism. She referred, not to Jimmy, but to Jimmy's father. Miss Nelly objected.

"Oh, don't be silly. Good enough for *her*, I always said. Great stuck-up thing, she was. I wonder what the child's like. . . ."

"Like her," groaned Miss Harriet, wiping her fingers again upon her skirt. "We don't want him here."

"Going off with him like that, of course, she's had a bad time."

"Serve her right," gruffly said Miss Harriet.

"Still, she *is* a cousin. . . . I think he'd better have a little bed in *your* room. See, mine's got the wardrobe and that. I expect Mrs. Beals would lend that little bed."

"In *my* . . . !"

Miss Harriet spoke in a thick, peremptory voice, raising a long, bony forefinger as if to emphasize the refusal she was about to give. Then she cleared her throat and half-turned away. Her nose and face twitched slightly.

IV

JIMMY came under the guard's care. He had been put into the train in London by his father, and a lady had promised to look after him until she left the carriage at Revelstone Junction. And at that point she gave him to the guard, and Jimmy sat on a little wooden box in the guard's van for the remainder of the journey, watching silently a young man who returned the stare from under his smart peaked cap, or whistled, or moved about looking at the parcels in his van; and Jimmy almost fell out of the train at each station, while the guard was away, and grew mysteriously dirtier with the passing of every mile. He was round-faced, and nearly six years old, and wore a large straw sailor's hat with elastic under his chin; but his face was rather white, and his pale blue eyes stared a little. He looked miserable and cowed, as if he were ready to cry. But he did not cry in the train, because he was staring at the guard. His basket of clothes for the visit was of the smallest. It was like a doll's basket. And by the time Marshmeadow was reached Jimmy was sleepy, and more homesick, and more frightened than ever; and when he was lifted out of the van by the guard and saw Miss Harriet waiting there for him on the platform, with severe eyes and two long creases in her cheeks, looking like a witch with tidy hair, Jimmy began to cry in earnest.

"Take me home!" he bellowed. "Take me home. Daddy, take me home!" He stamped quickly with both feet, his mouth stretched wide open, and big tears rolling down his cheeks. And then, as Miss Harriet stooped down in terror, taking both his hands in hers, trying to comfort him, Jimmy twisted away, almost screaming. When she would have coaxed, wiping away his tears with a lavender-scented pocket-handkerchief, Jimmy sniffed the strange and delightful scent, and wriggled more stubbornly, and at last blurted out the truth. "Go away. I don't—don't *like* you," he sobbed. "You're ugly. I want to go home. Daddy!"

It was the most tragic moment in his young life. Perhaps, also, in Miss Harriet's life, but as to that we do not know. They were alone together upon the platform, near the end of it, by the signal-box; and the train was gone, and the gleaming rails appeared to quiver in the heat. And the sky above was dazzling blue, and there were fresh green trees and brilliant summer flowers by the fence at the back of the platform, and the sweet smell of the country penetrated everything. But Jimmy saw none of these beauties—he saw only an old thin woman with severe eyes

and two long creases in her cheeks, looking like a witch with tidy hair, and smelling faintly of camphor, like a preserved moth. He screamed again, in terror at the thought that Miss Harriet was stealing him away from daddy and mummy, completely unmanageable. It was painful. The poor woman was full of sorrow at his state, at her own helplessness. She looked even more fiercely at Jimmy, with the fierceness of gruff desperation. Fortunately for Miss Harriet, Mr. Rawlings, the station-master, a man with very red cheeks and merry eyes, and rough, horny hands, came to her aid. He had seven children of his own, and knew how to manage little frightened boys.

"Here, here, here!" he cried, reassuringly to Jimmy. "What's all this about, hey?" And he chucked the little boy under the chin. To Miss Harriet he said: "Get him some sweets, Miss Harriet. That's what he wants. That'll quiet him. The poor lad's weary, that's what's the matter with him."

"I will. Of course I will," said Miss Harriet starting to her feet, feeling for a purse and finding none.

"Here, wait a bit. . . . Wait a bit. You stop where you are, Miss Harriet." And with that Mr. Rawlings went to a penny-in-the-slot machine, and brought back a piece of butter-scotch, which he tore from its carton as he walked. "Come along; try that, old man," he said. "That's better, ain't it?"

There was a moment's pause—of doubt, of fear, of instinctive recoil from persuasion. They all stood, as it were, on tiptoe, contemplating failure. Then Jimmy, half-sobbing still, and hiccupping from hunger and tears, took the sweet and brought it almost reluctantly to his mouth. Miss Harriet watched him sucking it. She stooped again, until her face was on a level with Jimmy's face.

"Are you all right now?" she asked in her gruff voice.

Jimmy nodded. He looked into the eyes so near his own. They were not so very fierce. Not so fierce, at any rate, as he had thought. He let her take his basket and his disengaged hand, grimy with travel. Together they left the station and went out into the village street, where other little boys and girls, released from school, were running and playing, or in clusters straggling home to tea.

V

WITHIN a week Jimmy had lost all fear of Marshmeadow. He was on friendly terms with George, who found him odd raspberries and loganberries and currants among the canes and bushes farthest from Miss Nelly's eye, and wiped his mouth roughly with a dirty handkerchief in case Miss Nelly should observe the betraying fruit stains. He was talked to and petted by Mrs. Wright, who brought him sweets in small paper bags from the village shop and ruffled his hair with a rasping hand. He ran and played in the garden (but not among the vegetables) and the pastures behind the cottage. And within doors he was always at home. Miss Nelly let him look at the photograph album, and showed him his granddad and grandma there, and Miss Harriet and herself when they were younger, and made little cakes and goodies for him, and saw that his digestion was not ruined. Miss Harriet helped him to wash and dress, and tucked him up in bed at night, and let him play with the less dangerous things in her work-basket, and even, when they were quite alone, sang to him.

By the end of his first seven days at the cottage Jimmy's face was less white, his body healthily plump, and his heart full of high spirits. He was very friendly with Miss Nelly, would hide from her and jump out with a bawl, and would then scamper off laughing; or would, under her command and as if for a wager, sit

without wriggling for five minutes. She, in return, would talk to him as from a height in an unnatural self-conscious voice, which showed how ill at ease she was with any child. She knew nothing of children. But as if Jimmy understood that, he was always attentive to her. He was on very good terms with Miss Nelly. Miss Harriet he adored. He would hug her at night and in the morning, pressing his little mouth to her cheek and snuggling his head under her chin. Miss Harriet blinked when he did this. Her nose and face twitched slightly.

She did not seem to Jimmy now to be ugly. All the frightening fierceness of her appearance caused him no fear at all. Sometimes with a finger he would even trace the lines of the creases on her cheeks, laughing softly to himself as he did so. That was when Jimmy was comfortably drowsy and was allowing himself to be babyish. And when he was up and dressed, when he was a man, he would run and shout from the garden, full of glee, to call Miss Harriet to see something he had found there, or to come instantly and watch a circus or heavy wagon passing through the village on its way to Revelstone.

"Aunt Harrie!" he would roar. "Come and look. Oh, *quick;* it's going!" And Harriet would sedately hurry to his side, and he would take her hand, and together they would watch the dragon-fly, or the disturbed beetle, or the passing caravans, entirely absorbed in the spectacle.

Upon such occasions Miss Nelly would watch them from a distance, either from the doorway of the cottage, or from one of the windows. And as she watched Miss Nelly's upper lip would slightly curl, as if at the sight of Miss Harriet making a fool of herself over Jimmy.

VI

ONE day Jimmy had an accident, and it was of much importance in this household. Miss Harriet was out, gone to the village, and he was playing by himself in the garden. He had been there for some time, busily pottering with stones and rubbish, and had become absorbed in his tasks. He had forgotten that Miss Harriet was out. And then suddenly came the catastrophe. George, trundling his old barrow round from one of the sheds at the back of the house, saw Jimmy run a few steps from his stones, turn and run back, hesitate, duck, his hands in the air, and finally, in flight, stumble. As he fell Jimmy gave a piercing shriek. He was up again in an instant, running to the house, screaming still, quite white with pain and terror. He had been stung by a wasp. Miss Nelly, sitting there by the window, who always knew what went on in the garden and knew the cure for every ache, threw down her work on the instant of Jimmy's first cry. She was in three flying steps across to the cupboard where soda was kept. There was excitement in her manner, her hands trembled, her breath came quickly. She was at the door by the time Jimmy, wildly sobbing, reached it.

"Why, what's the matter, little man," cried Miss Nelly, in the unnatural, self-conscious voice which, in speaking to Jimmy, she always used. She pretended not to have seen the whole affair. Her round pink face was flushed more deeply; her round grey eyes were soft. And then, at his hysterical cry: "Did a nasty wasp——"

Jimmy blindly tried to press past her, but Miss Nelly caught him by the hand that had been stung. He screamed again and struggled to be free. He struggled frantically, and Miss Nelly, forced to let his hand go, still intercepted, her eagerness alarming Jimmy the more. He was shivering and sobbing, wriggling out of her grasp, his eyes scared. Miss Nelly used her strength. She was unconscious, in her excitement, of the force she exerted. Her mouth was set, her sudden temper rising.

"No, no!" screamed Jimmy passionately. "No. Not you. Not you. Not you. I want Harrie. Harrie! Oh, where *are* you, Harrie!"

His voice was shrill with terror and distress. He had never been so frightened and in such agonizing pain.

"Here, my precious!" called Miss Harriet from just within the gate in the paling. She was running up the path, drawn by his screams. "I'm here. Harrie's coming!" She ran faster.

"Little *fool*, let me see to it!" cried Miss Nelly, seizing his arm ferociously. She was beside herself, had lost all control in sweeping vehemence.

"No!" Jimmy tore himself away, and in the action was flung, sobbing, into Miss Harriet's arms just as she reached the cottage doorway. He was gathered to her thin breast, close to that hungry witch's face with the long creases of sadness in it. There he was safe, was happy, against a heart that beat with love for him.

Miss Nelly stood breathless, her eyes glittering, her breast rising and falling fast. Her face, broad and plump, as she looked at Miss Harriet tending the poor wounded hand of Jimmy, was deeply reddened. Her mouth was tightly closed, as if by force.

VII

Another three weeks passed, and Emily Danvers came to take Jimmy back to London. She was a woman much younger than Miss Harriet and Miss Nelly, but her face was so thin and anxious that she looked as old as they were. She carried herself without grace, but she was tall, and her eyes were very kind and full of understanding. She was neatly but not well dressed in a dark skirt and light blouse, with a plain dark straw hat; and when she saw Jimmy waiting for her at the flower-decked railway station, so well and strong, she almost cried with gratitude to Miss Jedburys. Across her mind shot memory of hard things said by herself to her husband of Miss Harriet and Miss Nelly as thrifty skinflint spinsters, and she was ashamed. Jimmy had hold of Miss Harriet's hand as the train stopped, and jumped about with excitement as his mother came into view.

"Mummy, mummy!" he cried, and was off like a swallow, gathered to her arms, and hugged and set down again talking and laughing. Miss Harriet could see him pointing at herself. "That's my Harrie," he was saying. "No, my *Harrie.*"

Emmy came up, her face beaming and transfigured with sunshine and happiness. "You *have* been good to him," she said quite frankly, without "How d'you do?" or other greeting.

"H'm!" said Miss Harriet. And then, as both stood rather awkwardly silent: "I don't know what we shall do without him."

They went to the cottage which had been two cottages and had tea, and talked about the other children, and how they were better, and how Mr. Danvers had a good situation. Miss Jedburys did not invite Geraldine and Poppy to come and stay with them, or offer to give Emmy any fruit for them or for herself. They sat quite primly in the sitting-room, listening to Emmy, and both looking out through the window into the sunny garden, where Jimmy was playing for the last time with George and by himself. And so an hour, two hours, went by. At length Emmy began to call to her boy to leave the garden, and George, and his last game. And she and he, with both Miss Jedburys, trudged along the street and in through the booking hall of the railway station, and across the line to the other platform. There they stood in the late afternoon sun, which was burning the flowers into stronger scent and momentarily

more brilliant colouring, waiting for the train which was to leave Miss Jedburys all desolate, without the life of their home. And the little brown-faced Jimmy went from one to the other, strong and happy, sorry to be going, but not realizing that it was a real parting, because he thought he would often come back to Marshmeadow. As the train came in he suddenly turned and clung to Miss Harriet, and pressed his face to her long thin cheek as if he would never leave go. And even so did Miss Harriet cling to Jimmy.

"You'll come soon again," said Miss Harriet, as the train panted in.

"My Harrie!" said Jimmy.

"Good-bye, Jimmy," said Miss Nelly, standing quite still and watching them.

"'Bye," said Jimmy, and turned quickly from Miss Nelly's kiss. "Goo'bye, my Harrie!"

The two sisters remained standing upon the platform until the train was nearly out of sight. From one window of it came a little fluttering handkerchief. They stared at the tiny flicker of white as if both were petrified.

Miss Nelly, turning sharply away at last, saw Miss Harriet's mouth open, and her nose and face twitching.

"Oh, come along. Don't be a fool," she said brusquely, and led the way home again at a smart pace.

VIII

The week that followed was a gloomy one for the sisters. They went about their work quietly, and did not speak to each other. Only at the end of the week, while Miss Harriet was darning a pair of stockings, she came across in her work-basket a little toy of Jimmy's —a single painted tin coach from a toy railway system—which had been left there in forgetfulness. She turned the little coach over in her hand and thought a little while, and presently Miss Nelly saw a tear run down Miss Harriet's nose. She clenched her teeth in fierce exasperation.

"Oh, you *are!*" cried Miss Nelly in a fever. "I never knew anybody like you. Sigh, sigh, sigh, and now you're crying. All over a baby who's forgotten you ever existed."

"That's not true," said Miss Harriet huskily.

"Of course it's true. A child that age. He's got his sisters."

"He hasn't got me," answered Miss Harriet, staring before her.

Miss Nelly laughed scornfully.

"He's forgotten both of us," she said. "He was just as fond of me."

The words fell like stones in the silence, as any other unconvincing lie drops in its exposed nakedness to the ground.

"No, he wasn't," at last slowly answered Miss Harriet. "It was me he was fondest of. He wouldn't let you touch his wasp sting. He wouldn't let you put him to bed. It was me he loved. He said good-bye to me. . . ."

The little tin railway coach slipped from her hand as she spoke, and Miss Nelly rose to her feet. Her colour was heightened; her round grey eyes seemed to glow above her broad high cheek-bones.

"He was just as fond of me," she persisted. "In every way. Only you fussed over him. Ridiculous the way you fussed over the child." She pretended to laugh in scorn.

"No; he was fondest of me," slowly protested Miss Harriet.

The little coach lay upon the floor. Miss Nelly, quite crimson, her hands jerking with sudden uncontrollable passion, set her heel upon it, so that the gaudy tin coach was crushed and flattened into a hideous mass.

IX

Two days later there came a delayed letter from Emily Danvers. It was addressed to both Miss Jedburys, but Nelly was in the

house alone when the letter arrived. She read the letter, and saw a little enclosure—a twisted piece of paper, like a *billet doux*. The note had fallen out of Emmy's letter. Upon it, in tipsy pencilled capital letters, were the words "TO MY HARRIE." Like lightning Miss Nelly opened the note, and read, in the same tipsy capitals:

"DERE HARRY I LOVE YOU
I WISH YOU WAS HERE
LOTS OF KISES FROM YOUR
BOY JIM."

She put the twisted paper down and turned away. Her mouth was a small straight line in her face, bitter and unhappy. She stretched out her hand again for Jimmy's note, picked it up. "DERE HARRY," she read. And as she did this she clenched her fist, with the paper inside. It was crumpled into a ball. Without knowing what she was doing, Miss Nelly went across to the kitchen range, in which a fire was burning. In an instant the ball was a black flickering wisp, gone for ever. And when Miss Nelly had done this wicked thing she came back to her place, and left Emily's letter so that her sister could see it.

Miss Harriet was not long in coming back from her shopping. She came swinging up the path in her black dress, very gaunt and long-faced, but full of energy, and at once caught sight of Emmy's letter.

"That from Em?" asked Miss Harriet. Miss Nelly bent her head. She could not have spoken. Miss Harriet slowly read the letter, and turned over to the fourth page to read a postscript, as Miss Nelly had not done. "Here, where's my letter?" suddenly demanded Miss Harriet.

"Your what?" Miss Nelly was as pale as death.

"My letter. Em says she's enclosing a letter. What have you done with it? My letter from Jimmy."

"I've seen no——"

"Don't tell lies. Just *look* at you. What have you done with it?"

They faced each other. Miss Harriet, very tall and bony, with two long creases in her long face, and her mouth turned down at the corners, like a witch, and as red as a dull old brick; Miss Nelly, rather shorter, plumper, with grey eyes that sought to hide themselves from Miss Harriet's accusing gaze. There was a grim encounter. Miss Harriet's long, thin finger was raised. Her nose and face twitched unmistakably. Miss Nelly drew her breath. Her nerve failed suddenly. She was ghastly white. She could not for this occasion command the scene. Tears were in her throat.

"I burnt it," she muttered. And then, louder: "Yes, I burnt it. A child's scrawl. Threw it in the fire thinking it was rubbish."

Miss Harriet was at her full height. The grey face was like the face of a martyr.

"You liar. You liar. I'll never say another word to you as long as I live," she cried. "Never." And with that she walked out of the room and out of the cottage.

X

A QUARTER of an hour later Miss Nelly, from her bedroom, saw Miss Harriet returning, walking up the brick-paved pathway in company with Mr. Brewster, the jobbing builder and carpenter of the village. A jerk ran through Miss Nelly's body at sight of this. She hurried downstairs, and listened from behind the door to what Miss Harriet said to Mr. Brewster.

"Used to be two cottages," she was saying. "I want it two again. Can you brick up this doorway? The rest of the place is all separate. Only wants this doorway bricking up. Can you do it?"

Mr. Brewster, clearly puzzled,

fumbled for his reply. He was a very good-natured old man who could remember Miss Jedburys as young girls, and who would have claimed to be a common friend.

"I hope——" he said hesitatingly. "No offence, Miss Harriet, that there's nothing wrong between you and your sister?"

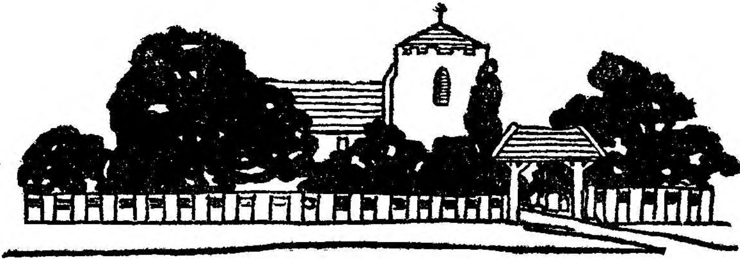
"Never mind about that. We're going to live separate in future, that's all. Can you brick up that doorway? Come on, man. Yes or no."

"Oh, yes, Miss Harriet," stammered Mr. Brewster.

"Well, do. Start to-morrow. See? I want it *finished* to-morrow."

And it was done. And so it remains. And so Miss Jedburys live now next door to one another. They never meet or speak, but live alone. The whole village knows they have quarrelled, but not what the quarrel was about. For two years now the estrangement has lasted, and there is no sign that it will ever end. Jimmy has never again come to Marshmeadow. He does not write, and his mother does not write, to Miss Jedburys. They never hear of Jimmy. I am waiting to see what happens when one of them falls ill. Both are hardy yet, and the crisis may take ten years to arrive.

FRANK SWINNERTON.



MY MEMORIES OF YOU

My memories are music
Years cannot mute;
The soft and lovely trembling
Of the flute!

My memories are music:
The frail, thin
And wistful question
Of the violin.

But, oh, my memories of you!
No tone,
No instrument, can give
Me these, alone.

My memories of you
That perish never,
Are like a voice heard once—
Then stilled forever.

Heard once, then nevermore.
But sounding on
Within the soul
Until the world is gone.

MARY CAROLYN DAVIES.

COWSLIPS

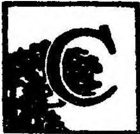
I took the loitering westward train,
I could not tell them why,
I only longed to breathe again
Beneath an Irish sky.
Through old Pat Mahoney's green demesne,
Over the crumbling wall,
The far-off Reeks bulk through the rain,
The moorhens cry and call.
Such greenness where the cowslips grow!
Their stalks are fat with wine,
Their freckled faces nod and blow,
Their eyes stare into mine.
Not easily shall we find fair
The meagre fields of home,
Not while the hills of Ireland bare
Their breasts in yellow foam.

MARION PEACOCK.

The Hare and the Tortoise

By Grenville Hammerton

"Someone sputtered and grabbed at Banstead's elbow as he peered ahead. It was the wireless officer again. The *Coimbra* might survive four hours, though that was doubtful. She had struck floating wreckage and ripped half the bottom out of herself ; she carried a full complement of passengers."



CAPTAIN LYSAGHT was throwing his weight about a bit, as befitted a man who commanded such a ship as the *Fervent.* And everyone in the captains' parlour of the Fouled Anchor knew perfectly well that Captain Lysaght was aiming his barbed shafts at the target of Captain Banstead, because there had been a sort of rivalry between the two ever since they served their apprenticeship in company aboard the *Kind Friends.*

Lysaght was backed up by much influence—was not a cousin of his a shareholder in the line that owned the *Kind Friends?* Did not that barque's captain treat him differently from the seven other boys who overfilled the *Kind Friends'* half-deck? Wasn't he invited down to the cabin for meals on Sundays? Whereas Banstead—poor old Banstead—hadn't a friend in the world. Indeed, everyone knew he'd been taken on at a reduced premium because his widowed mother really couldn't afford the terms imposed by the *Kind Friends'* owners, and consequently Lysaght, with influence behind him, could afford to be patronizing, and was.

And here, after the lapse of many years, the two had foregathered in the captains' room of the Fouled Anchor: Banstead skipper of a go-as-you-please tramp of five thousand tons burthen, with an economical speed of eleven knots, though she might do thirteen if pressed; Lysaght commanding officer of the *Fervent!*

"The Queen of the Western Ocean!" Lysaght boasted. "Never a ship launched to touch her—either for speed or size. She'd sail rings round your rusty old *Plinlimmon.* The biggest plum of the whole profession, and we fly the Blue Ensign, of course." Disinterested critics always said that Lysaght out-Navyed the Navy by virtue of his twelve months' R.N.R. training.

"All the same," Banstead stated patiently, "the *Plinlimmon's* a good ship. Oh, yes, I've no fault to find with her. Weatherly ship—handy, too. She mightn't carry a lot of swagger passengers, but she manages to get her cargoes through all right, one way and another."

"Take care they don't put you on to carry my ashes," scoffed Lysaght, and ordered another drink suitable to his standing—champagne and stout discreetly mixed. Banstead mentioned to the bustling barmaid that his would be as before—plain beer.

"Remember those muddy old days aboard the old *Kind Friends?"* Lysaght asked, opulently eyeing his drink. "Stinking old packet she was, upon my word. How I stuck it I don't know. There was that night down the Easting when she was shipping it green, and I had to go aloft, I remember, to cut away the main topgallant sail——"

"There was that other night off Cape Stiff, too," murmured Banstead, unable to refuse the oppor-

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tunity because of the sneering intolerance. Captain Lysaght flushed under his becoming tan at mention of that night. He had not distinguished himself. It was a bad night, the sort of night, indeed, when all the influence in the world can't keep a man out of danger. But something else had stowed apprentice Lysaght in a lamp-locker for'ard what time Banstead was aloft, leading the staggered crew to a fresh assault on the ripped topsail.

"Oh, be hanged!" said Lysaght. "What does it matter what happened twenty years ago in a condemned stick-and-string coffin-ship that hadn't any business to be afloat? Got your extra ticket yet, Banstead?"

"Yes—oh, yes, I got it when I was twenty-three."

Lysaght had contrived to secure his extra ticket at thirty-five, and had paved the way to success by judicious dinners given to a flesh-pot-loving examiner.

"Sticking in low-down tramps for the rest of your life, I suppose?" The sneer was evident in his voice. "If you like I'll use my influence to get you a berth in our line. You've got to start as fourth officer, though, even if you've had command."

"Thanks, liner life never appealed to me a great deal," Banstead said quietly.

"That's because you don't know what it's like, and I tell you there's nothing the matter with it. I dined with a millionaire last night—passenger who took a fancy to me. He did me pretty well, too, though he had to ask me to order the wine." Lysaght was talking for effect; he cast covert glances about the parlour to see how his lordliness was impressing the few other patrons. "And the pretty girls, believe me, they're buzzing about a man like flies. I could tell you yarns——"

He winked meaningly, inferring that he had been hero of a thousand easy conquests.

"Come down aboard us and dine—to-night, say!" he invited. "Old times' sake and all the rest of it, you know. Let you see what a real ship is like. It ought to be a bit of a change from the tramping end of our job."

Without precisely knowing why, Banstead accepted.

"Evening dress, of course; I always make my officers toe the line," said Lysaght. "And afterwards I'll show you round; by Jove! she's a *ship*."

Banstead got into his seldom-worn evening clothes with difficulty; and even when so attired presented the appearance of a shipmaster and nothing more. Lysaght, on the contrary, receiving him in state, gave the impression of a distinguished diplomatist. The years of success had polished and repolished him. He did the honours of his ship with fluent ease; and the dinner was a revelation to Banstead, accustomed to the casual fare of tramp-life, where the costs must be cut whatever else happens. He estimated that the waste from the *Fervent's* table would keep the *Plinlimmon's* cabin supplied for a week and then leave a handsome "black pan" for the firemen's mess. Afterwards, in Lysaght's cabin, Banstead saw a framed photograph.

"Of course, Miss Merriman crossed with you when she came over," he remarked.

"Know her? There's a girl I've taken a tremendous fancy for. That photograph doesn't do her justice, though."

"No, it doesn't." Banstead possessed a copy of that same photograph, and his copy was signed, which, he was gratified to observe, Lysaght's was not.

"A man might do worse than marry that girl—when he's got to the top of the tree," the *Fervent's* captain said complacently. "After this ship there's nothing else to aim at. The pay's darned good, and then there's my private income—nothing to brag about, but still it all helps. The trouble about being married is that the lady passengers

get to know about it, and—well, it sort of limits a man. But if Eileen Merriman makes the return trip with us, I think—really and truly, I think—of course, her old man has all the money in the world, and she's an only daughter."

"She's a thoroughly nice girl," Banstead said. Although not normally given to bitterness, it was impossible to escape a little twinge of dissatisfaction with the existing condition of affairs. This big, lordly Lysaght seemed to get everything that was going, as he had done from the earlier days.

Aboard the *Kind Friends*, he had been everyone's pet—relieved from the most onerous duties because of the influence behind him. No matter who went wet and hungry Lysaght fared softly. And, although not a good sailor, according to Banstead's somewhat critical standards, he'd contrived to earn all the scanty praise that was going about. He was the barque's star apprentice—taken aft to the cabin in port to be introduced to visiting shipmasters, their wives and daughters; taken ashore to carry the skipper's papers——

And so it had been all through: influence had pushed him forward determinedly. So here he was, captain of this crack liner, of whose speed and weatherliness he boasted vaingloriously—as though he'd designed and built her—whilst Banstead, who'd started level, though without the thrust of that invaluable influence to aid him, was merely skipper of a rusty, homely, cargo-hunting tramp that could, at a pinch, be carried on the *Fervent's* deck. So there was every prospect that, having set his lordly mind to work on the idea of marrying Miss Eileen Merriman, Lysaght would succeed in so doing, as he had succeeded in everything.

There was no doubt about it, though: the *Fervent* was a picture of a ship. Lysaght, in a cigarful splendour, conducted his guest everywhere, from the officers' mess-room, where bridge was in progress, to the gleaming engine-room.

"Twenty-four knots, and that's without pushing her," he boasted. "I tell you, there isn't anything afloat to touch her. How much can that ash-barrel of yours do when you find a lump of decent coal?"

"Say twelve—yes, twelve's about her best," Banstead said, trying not to be envious. This was the sort of ship he'd dreamed of; but a man can't content himself with existing as junior officer of a swagger line on indifferent pay when a widowed mother, who has denied herself many little necessaries in order to establish her son in a loved profession, needs ameliorations. Chances of ultimate glory in the company that owned the *Plinlimmon* were scant; but the pay of a second mate was several pounds a month better than the pay of a fourth officer in the Trans-oceanic Line; and promotion was quicker, too.

"Good Lord! What does it feel like to crawl along at twelve?"

"It depends on the weather. But she's not a bad old tub, the *Plinlimmon*. I've seen her through some nasty weather, and she's never let me down."

Banstead was conducted to the exquisite drawing-rooms; to the baronial dining-saloon; he was tempted with cunning drinks served by stewards who were the last word in efficiency. And all the time Lysaght boasted, though somewhat covertly. Liquor affected him that way, it seemed. He pulled out copies of the ship's log to prove her wonderment—indicated day after day of almost unbelievable speed. It all left Banstead somewhat bewildered; if the truth may be confessed, a little ashamed of the indifferent showing he had made in a profession that demanded from its adherents the best of which they were humanly capable. The only consolation that he could hug to his bosom was remembrance that his mother had lived in modest comfort until her recent death.

The Hare and the Tortoise

When he got back aboard the *Plinlimmon* he contrasted her severe ugliness with the *Fervent's* gorgeous splendour: to do otherwise were an impossibility. Here no smartly uniformed quartermaster greeted him at the gangway; only a semi-intoxicated night-watchman, who mentioned that the second mate had come aboard, and was even now fighting in the forecastle with a refractory member of the crew. The second mate appeared almost on the word, blowing on abraded knuckles, in a mood to declare that he'd settled Ryan's hash for him. Banstead stumbled over a litter of cargo-gear on his way to his own cabin. He collected a smear of red lead on his evening trousers. His room had not been set to rights by his steward after he had changed; the clothes he had discarded were left where they had been thrown. The bed was unmade, the dirty glasses from his entertainment of customs house officers were still on the table. And Lysaght had shown him his patent wardrobe, where every jacket was hung carefully and every pair of trousers in its appointed press.

He glanced at his reflection in the mirror: surrounded by chandlers' cards, not adorned with photographs of flamboyant feminine beauty.

"Don't seem to have got very far," he informed that reflection. He saw in the glass a plain face, a face whose jaw jutted out like a cliff; a hard, homely face, relieved from sheerest ugliness only by the steady grey eyes. His evening collar had wilted and his tie was up under one ear—he was not accustomed to evening clothes. To him it seemed that he looked common; he contrasted himself with Lysaght—Lysaght who had lordlily treated him in old-time days much as the elder son of a noble house treats an under-gardener.

"A lot of chance I'd stand with you, against him!" he apostrophized the signed portrait of Miss Eileen Merriman. "Well, it can't be helped. Mother died in comfort, anyhow."

Shifting from side to side in his bunk, sleepless by reason of something that must have been envy, he reviewed long-past days, and wondered if he had indeed wasted his time. Of course he had: there was Lysaght as definite proof. Lysaght's professional income was treble his own, even at a modest computation. Lysaght was a success: people expressly booked passage in the *Fervent* for the sake of enjoying his company. Whereas not a soul knew Banstead of the *Plinlimmon*, beyond a few hard-drinking agents in foreign ports, and his own officers and men, who signed on afresh, voyage after voyage, for no particular reason, unless it was that they trusted their skipper. Banstead was the sort of skipper men look up to and rely on in moments of such emergency as the sea provides.

He wondered, as the dawn broke through scuttles that had not recently been cleaned, whether he mightn't be better advised to cut away from the tramping trade even thus late along, and engage himself in swagger liners, for at the moment there were no pressing claims upon his resources. Pay as junior officer in the line that owned the *Fervent* wasn't wealth beyond avarice's dreams by any means; but it was sufficient for a man to live on and supply himself with the ornate uniforms demanded. If Eileen Merriman decided to cross westward in the *Fervent* when her European holiday was over, the most junior officer aboard that startling liner might conceivably receive a morning smile from her and, indeed, engage in conversation with her, although the company's rules were all against association between passengers and personnel.

Banstead did a lot of confused thinking about Eileen Merriman before his slatternly steward brought him morning tea. You really couldn't get the right hang of a

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girl like that—she didn't answer to any previous standards. When Banstead was introduced into her home, she'd treated him very decently: had insisted, indeed, on hearing from his own unpliant lips records of adventuring far afield. She, being young and beautiful—remembrance of her beauty caused a dull ache to set up about Banstead's heart—naturally saw romance in his prosaic career. His escapade in running guns, for instance, to a revolutionary committee in South America—narration of that had caused her eyes to sparkle and her cheeks to flush very enticingly. But if Banstead had explained that he simply took on the job by reason of the tempting extra pay—what then? He hadn't paused to inquire which of the conflicting parties in Esqueala had the rights of the matter; he'd simply seen an opportunity of earning extra cash that would serve to give his mother a few luxuries from which she'd studiously denied herself. It was pure accident that the party he had armed had won and established a sound and rather admired government in a land that had been notorious for mismanagement and tyranny. But Eileen Merriman had rather looked upon Captain Banstead as Esqueala's saviour, and she'd donated him that signed photograph in her enthusiasm—and Lysaght's copy wasn't signed!

Then, too, that very ordinary, casual affair—a chance adventure of deep-sea travel, when the *Plinlimmon* rescued the crew of the foundering Norwegian: it was really nothing; an easy matter that hardly necessitated the calling out of the watch below; but Miss Merriman seemed to think a vast deal of heroism had been displayed. But Banstead, when he accompanied a laughterful party to a dancing club, hadn't shown himself up at all well. He couldn't dance, for one thing; he'd never been able to afford time to learn, somehow, nor money to pay for tuition. Lysaght, on the other hand, with his polished manner and his social accomplishments, would have been the star of the evening; he wouldn't have permitted Miss Merriman, in the generosity of her big heart, to sit out dance after dance and pretend that dancing had no attractions for her. Lysaght wouldn't have tolerated that sort of thing; and if Miss Merriman had told him that she infinitely preferred to listen to narrations of perils faced and overcome in preference to enjoying herself as her radiant youth demanded, Lysaght would have voiced some brilliant bit of badinage, with a compliment tacked on to it, and so—oh, hang!

The steward, shirt-sleeved, with an unclean apron hitched over his shore-going trousers, unshaven, thick-headed and red-eyed from a night's carousal ashore, started like a scared cat at the rasp in Banstead's voice. Then, after a few pungent home-truths that stung like vitriol, he set to work to sweep and polish until Banstead's room was like a newly-minted dollar for shining brightness; after which deftly laying toilet gear in readiness, he shambled to the galley and confided to the cook that the old man must have picked up an awful jag overnight, because warmed dynamite was scented roses by comparison with his present mood.

The shore-gangs started working cargo as Banstead shaved. The tramp became a pandemonium of noise; dust flew everywhere. Descending to breakfast—stale eggs and acrid bacon—Banstead had mental pictures of leisurely Lysaght consulting an imposing menu. But when he went out on deck and, from the captain's promenade, considered the unlovely *Plinlimmon*, he discovered within himself a genuine liking for the tramp. Hang it! She wasn't so bad; and he and the ship had been through some roughish times together, one way and another. The grizzled old chief

engineer presented his garrulous self, and spoke triumphantly of engine-room repairs passed by the superintendent without question. Inside a week, said Maclaren, they'd have the "job" working as smoothly as silk again. A good job she was below, and with the few defects made good, would be a job to arouse enthusiasm in the hearts of such as served her.

Then, too, the dock postman brought letters: one from the owners, stating that in view of Captain Banstead's recent good services, they had been pleased to increase his stipend by an extra ten pounds a month. Another was from none other than Eileen Merriman—a bright, chatty letter describing her adventures in Europe, and stating her intention of returning to America by the *Coimbra*, of the Pink Stripe Line, in two months' time. A paragraph at the letter's foot caused Banstead seriously to think. It simply said: "I wish you were captain of the *Coimbra*."

Following these heartening messages, a clerk from the office appeared, desiring a copy of an entry in the log of some voyages past; and, turning over the weather-stained leaves in search of the entry, Banstead read on the pages—smeared with water and oil as they were—details of gallant struggling past, what time the ship had behaved in noteworthy fashion.

"Not a bad old packet!" he declared, when the clerk had gone; and slapped the teak rail of his scanty promenade with a hearty hand. None the less, he'd fallen far and very far behind in the race.

Half a dozen snorting tugs shifted the palatial *Fervent* into the dock already occupied by the *Plinlimmon*. She was coming under the enormous electric crane that was the great port's pride, in order to have a boiler removed and a new one installed. Banstead watched her adroit manœuvring; through his binoculars he scanned her well-peopled decks; marked how the various evolutions were completed without unseemly outcry. A single whistle blast served in lieu of disorderly shouting; the sun picked out gold lace on bridge and forecastle and poop; there was no small display of smart uniforms. The whole movement was carried out with the smooth precision of a perfect machine. It was impossible for him not to contrast the shifting of his own ship, generally performed at night, in driving rain, with insufficient help. The din, the confusion, the everlasting dirt! No, he decided, Lysaght had gained the blue ribbon.

He had a whimsical thought of inviting the *Fervent's* captain aboard the *Plinlimmon* for lunch. But reflecting what that lunch would be—the plainest of fare, none too well cooked, served on linen that had already undergone best part of a week's casual use, the owners of the tramp did not believe in inflated laundry bills—he reconsidered his decision. Anyhow, Lysaght would be better off aboard his own steam hotel, where the biggest manœuvres did not disturb in even the smallest measure the activities of the domestic staff.

The *Plinlimmon* and the *Fervent* left port on the same tide, the *Plinlimmon* leading the way, since it was not necessary for her to tie up to the landing stage and await the swarms of passengers. As the tramp slugged down-river towards open water, her slatternly decks high piled with bunker coal, her semi-intoxicated crew reluctantly cleaning her up, with dirty water streaming from every scupper, listed heavily to starboard, the mate in shabby dungarees wielding a hose, and the second mate rousing the unwilling deck-hands about, with a greasy trimmer emptying ash-buckets, the *Fervent* came storming past like a greyhound, every port-hole of her countless port-holes a-wink in the sun glare, brass shining like gold, the white paint of her top-sides dazzling the eyes, trim and

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taut from well-marked waterline to the gilded balls on her mast-trucks, her considerable crew at stations, and her band playing jazz music on the veranda deck. She was a maritime picture, well deserving her proud name. She swept closely past the trudging *Plinlimmon.* A few of her passengers studied the tramp casually, and turned away to notice a picturesque barge that was tediously working up against the tide.

Not all at once—not, indeed, until an imperious hoot from the liner's siren attracted his attention—did Banstead realize the *Fervent* was signalling. Her Morse lamp was winking swiftly. And there was only one man aboard the *Plinlimmon* who could read the message—Banstead himself. With his own hands he hoisted the red and white answering pendant, as token that the message was received and understood. The tramp did not boast a Morse lamp or semaphore. She was strictly utilitarian, only carried wireless, indeed, because the laws which governed her movements demanded such equipment.

"Pleasant passage," Banstead read. "Hope to see you coming back!"

It rankled a little—oh, yes, it rankled. Showing off before influential passengers, of course. That was Lysaght's game. He'd be telling them, these opulent voyagers, how he and Banstead had started level in the race; he'd be making comparisons.

"Curse him, he's got all the luck!" Banstead said, and shook his fist at the swinging stern as it diminished in the misty distance ahead.

Fate sent the *Plinlimmon* southward, seeking freights as lions seek their meat from God. She wandered here and she wandered there before securing a full cargo, and when she got it it was a full cargo enough to load her scupper deep. None the less, Banstead had had time wherein to recover from his smarting sense of envy of Lysaght. The *Plinlimmon* mightn't be a sea palace, but she was a paying proposition. Now everyone at sea knew the *Fervent* lost money for her owners every trip; that she was merely a splendid advertisement for their meaner ships. The *Plinlimmon* was doing some genuine creative good in the national scheme of things; the *Fervent*—well, she was the picturesque lady who existed by others' efforts, a parasite-ship, in a word.

The *Plinlimmon,* pursuing her appointed course, struck a patch of foul weather west of the Bay of Biscay. It was nasty weather, with a threat of worse to come. "Nothing to gain by pounding into this," said Banstead to his grizzled, weather-wise mate. "Ease her down and make her comfortable. We're not carrying the mails this trip!"

It was an ever-recurring pleasure to him to watch the *Plinlimmon's* behaviour in a seaway. Ugly, unornamented, built purely for utility as she was, her designers and builders had, probably inadvertently, endued her with the soul of a fighter. This infrequently happens in these days of cut-price competition, and when it does occur the result is a ship to earn a man's pride and, indeed, his love. The *Plinlimmon* was such a ship, but she never showed her qualities unless the odds against her summoned them in to evidence.

Then she displayed her soul in the cunningness of her fighting. The sea had no terrors for her; she was worldly wise in battling. She knew her own strength, and in no wise belittled the strength of the opposing forces, but she feinted and affected to retreat, cowered back in seeming panic until the riotous combers had volleyed over her. Then, collecting her latent strength, she surged resolutely forward again, leaving the white-lipped seas roaring impotently at their repeated failures.

"Does a man's heart good to watch her," Banstead said. "But she's

going to have a dusting this good night, I'll bet a hat!" He walked into the chart-room and consulted the barometer. It stood at a trifle over twenty-nine, and descended as he tapped the glass. The mercury barometer showed a concave surface and a tendency to pump a litttle.

"*Nasty* weather!" thought Banstead, and was met in the doorway by the wireless operator. By the wavering light of the oil lamp that was the chart-room's only illuminant, Banstead read the message. It was curt, simple, as most pregnant messages are.

"*Coimbra* sinking, S O S," it said, and added the latitude and longitude.

The first thought that leaped searingly to Banstead's mind—entirely unprofessional—was that Eileen Merriman had booked her passage aboard the *Coimbra.* Consequently the moisture on his forehead was not all salt spray. Then—he had trained himself to think coherently—he realized that the dates didn't fit in. Eileen might have booked passage in the *Coimbra,* but certainly not on this voyage. None the less, there was a call from suffering and imperilled humanity. Captain Banstead bent over the chart-table. "Send a reply that we're coming," he told the wireless operator. He swiftly plotted the given position of the *Coimbra,* as swiftly fixed the *Plinlimmon's* place on the waters. In a trifle over a minute he knew that a distance of forty-five nautical miles separated ship from sinking ship. He replaced his streaming sou'-wester—having doffed it as he bent over the chart, to avoid defacing the perishable paper—and made for the deck.

"Alter course, N. 17 W.," he ordered. "Put her up to full speed! She can stand it at a pinch. There's a liner sinking; we've got to drive this tub as she's never been driven before."

The mate rang the engine-room telegraph even before he gave the steadying orders to the man in the wheelhouse. Down the speaking-tube Banstead spoke to the engineer on watch, giving him a hint of what was toward. The resultant increase in the pulsing of the *Plinlimmon's* decks told that the engineer had given a full throttle. The force of the wind seemed to increase; a considerable pile of solid water lifted itself high above the tramp's bow and crashed like an avalanche on her decks.

"Rouse out the hands—get her battened down, I'll look after her," Banstead said, and the mate clumped from the bridge. There was very little to be done, for the *Plinlimmon* was no mass of eye-wash gadgets meant to attract passengers. She was practically always stripped for fighting. The mate had a few ventilators unshipped and stowed away, with plugs to replace them. The deck-hands worked waist-deep in water now. Derricks were unshipped and lashed over the two forward hatches to break the deadly weight of pounding water. A galloping sea snatched the forecastle bell from its moorings and drove it like a shell aft to the bulkhead of Banstead's cabin, in which it embedded itself. But the ship went on, driven remorselessly by her powerful and well maintained engines.

Someone sputtered and grabbed at Banstead's elbow as he peered ahead. It was the wireless officer again. The *Coimbra* might survive four hours, though that was doubtful. She had struck floating wreckage and ripped half the bottom out of herself. Some of her boats were floatable, many were not; she carried a full complement of passengers. There was also another message—from the *Fervent*—stating that the crack liner was making all speed to the scene of disaster. The second mate came to the bridge, roused out along with the others of the watch below.

"See where the *Fervent* is—how she lies with regard to the wreck!" ordered Banstead. And, since

crack liners run to schedule like express trains, with their tracks plainly marked on the wireless charts, it was not at all a difficult matter. The *Fervent* was seventy miles from the sinking *Coimbra*. The *Fervent's* speed was twenty-four knots—that meant that three hours' steaming should bring her to the scene. The *Plinlimmon*, forty-five miles distant, could count on four hours and a bit, if she made her top speed.

"Twenty-four knots an hour," said Banstead, when the result was made known. "That's her best fine-weather clip, and it isn't fine weather now. Ask the chief to come up here."

The chief engineer, warmed with a sup of raw whisky, opined that his engines were capable of being driven still a little more. He expressed an opinion of the *Fervent's* engines and engineers that need not be set down here, for he was a tramping man, with a long sea record and with no affection for gold lace and record-breakers.

"They daren't drive her—not in this," he said, as a final word. "Man, she's like a knife; she buries hersel'. I ken her fine—ma wife's thirrd cousin twice removed is second o' her. Like as not she'll dee-velop deefects."

"You think we'd better crack on, then?" Banstead asked.

"Why for no? We're a ship, no a floatin' hotel. An' think o' the complainin' passengers! Like as no yon *Fervent* 'll arrive too late tae be o' use, beyond snafflin' a' the credit."

But driving the *Plinlimmon* through the boiling fury of the increasing gale, Banstead forgot to think of any credit that might accrue to him. It was the age-old call of the distressed that he was answering; prepared to risk his ship to her ultimate ounce of fighting capacity in honourable endeavour.

Somewhere out there behind that yelling void were hundreds of fear-stricken souls, who depended on him for continued life. He wished he had been master of the speedy *Fervent*, so that her speed might have answered his urgent desires; but, since things were as they were, it was incumbent upon him to turn the drudge he commanded into the likeness of Lysaght's flier.

His trick of seamanship helped him no little; his familiarity with the ship was a present help. He humoured the *Plinlimmon* when it seemed she was beaten back to the ropes by every means in his power. He sent men forward to dribble oil through the hawse-pipes to lessen the weight of the battering seas. When the smooths came he drove his ship on at her fullest speed, yelling to the engine-room for even more revolutions. He ordered all three watches of the firemen down into the stokehold to make more steam. At times he took the wheel himself, dissatisfied with the helmsman; and the perfect understanding existing between hand and man caused the *Plinlimmon* to maintain a course so straight that might have been ruled across the ocean wastes.

Only occasionally did the reality of this rivalry enter his brain. But when it did it served as a notable spur to his energies. There was Lysaght, favoured by fortune: a crack skipper in a crack ship, with every advantage in his favour, as always; there was himself: an obscurity in a ship that was never mentioned, save in the Lloyds' news, and even then, as it were, grudgingly. Of course, had Eileen Merriman been passenger aboard the *Coimbra* it would have been different—there'd have been a definite race between himself and Lysaght for the girl's life—something like rivalry, that! The man who saved her could lawfully claim her—but Eileen wasn't aboard the *Coimbra*. She couldn't be. Many others were, however—as precious to their friends as Eileen was to Captain Banstead.

And the *Plinlimmon* was playing the game. You couldn't get away from that. Her resolute trudging did not diminish when the seas struck her; she was as cunning as a cart-load of monkeys. She did cower back when the big stuff rose high and towered ominously; but after it had fallen she came on again, indomitably—and the beat of her propeller in the smooth spells sounded like a clarion call of hope to Banstead's soul.

A finer-built ship, driven at a more headlong speed must have buried herself, driven under the combers, carried away vital portions of her structure; but the *Plinlimmon*, owning no frills, had nothing to lose. She was like a cutlass wielded by a man stripped to the waist. The *Fervent*, on the other hand, was like a delicate rapier in the hands of one who boasted ruffles to his wrists, a satin-clad dandy who had his appearance to consider.

Lysaght was realizing this. His ship that could reel off a steady twenty-four knots in smooth water, was tearing herself to pieces as he endeavoured to drive her through this heart-breaking medley of hostile water and screaming wind. Her very size was against her, for one thing—her riotous pitches threatened to break her back. She was under water for nine minutes out of every ten, carrying away too sumptuous deck-fittings, permitting water to drive down into her passenger accommodation. Her vaunted twenty-four knots dwindled down to sixteen, down to twelve. Even then her worried senior chief engineer complained of strains that were unendurable.

"Keep her going—she's got to move!" said Lysaght; but almost as he spoke the *Fervent* shipped big water that swept her, shook her bridge, snapped certain of its stanchions.

"It isn't humanly possible to drive her this way," Lysaght said. He was suddenly afraid of his ship. At least, that was what he told himself. The *Fervent* hadn't been built for this sort of work. He, who had posed in the sight of admiring passengers as the complete seaman, didn't understand his ship. He had been accustomed to surrender to the weight of opposition—making up for such surrenders in smooth weather when he could drive the liner at her swiftest.

His entire career, he realized bitterly, had been a compromise, and on this stormful night, his face washed by driven spindrift, cold and scared as he was, he discovered himself thinking of boyish days aboard the *Kind Friends*. Particularly did he remember—though he endeavoured to forget it—one screaming night off the pitch of the Horn when Banstead, coming down from a desperate achievement aloft, had discovered him crouched, afraid to the deeps of his soul, in a locker for'ard, with oddments of ironmongery draped about his person in order that he might sink the quicker if the ultimate plunge demanded it.

His senior wireless operator brought him a message which had been intercepted. It was from the *Plinlimmon's* captain, stating that he hoped to reach the scene of distress in time, if only the *Coimbra* people would exert every effort to hold out.

"Oh, let Banstead do it, then," said Lysaght, as he had said many a dozen times before.

As it happened Banstead did it. The hard-driven, bare-washed *Plinlimmon* reached the sinking *Coimbra* just in time to effect communication and save every harassed soul aboard.

The survivors afterwards sang a pæan of praise of Banstead's masterly handling of a difficult situation. For it is no small matter to salve six hundred human beings in a shrieking cyclone, especially when it is necessary to work against time. But Banstead did it.

Amongst the first of the survivors

to reach the *Plinlimmon's* deck was Eileen Merriman, who had altered her sailing date. And within a quarter of an hour of the *Coimbra's* last man—her captain—crossing the clamorous void between ship and ship, the *Coimbra* sank, with her furnaces drowned out and her pumps useless.

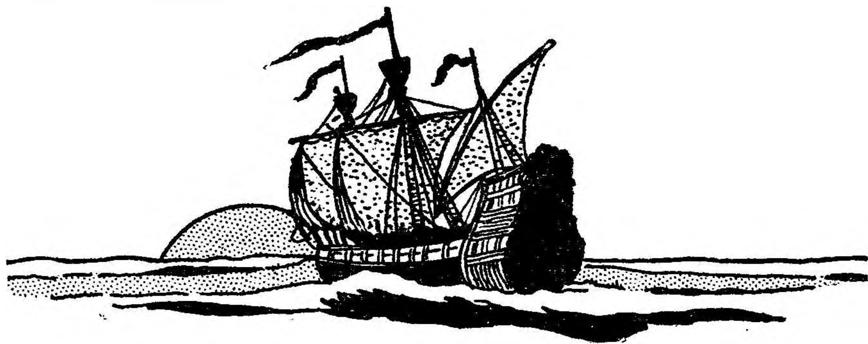
Still an hour later the *Fervent*, with engine-room defects and her recently installed boiler leaking badly and adrift on its beds, limped into view. In the dawnlight she presented a dishevelled sight. Indeed, to an unbiased observer, the sturdy *Plinlimmon* might have appealed more than the crippled liner, though the *Coimbra's* survivors were but scurvily housed. With the exception of Eileen Merriman, that is. She was housed in Banstead's own cabin, where she seemed to derive pleasure from the presence of her own gifted portrait.

"Have you seen anything of the *Coimbra?*" the *Fervent* signalled imperiously.

The *Plinlimmon's* reply was by flag signal alone, for Banstead was too busy settling his salvage to have time to trouble with lengthy explanations.

"All *Coimbra's* passengers and crew safe aboard," flagged the *Plinlimmon.* "Can we be of any assistance?"

GRENVILLE HAMMERTON.



MUSKOKA

Muskoka the wonderful, the tall high ship,
The queen of all the sea birds by the old landing slip,
Muskoka the fly-away, the free-footed clipper,
Running south by westerly, a-losing the dipper.

Muskoka the mystical, her three skysails set,
Phantom dream of loveliness, her long sides shining wet,
Muskoka the glorious, the fast-footed racer,
Lost, lost her loveliness—ah, none may e'er replace her.

'Twas there they taught me splicing, there how to steer,
There to furl a royal and to reeve a gantline clear:
'Twas there I dreamed of Heaven, and Heaven's singing sea,
A-steering old Muskoka a-whispering to me.

Sailing days are done, and Muskoka no more
May wing her long way homing from any distant shore.
Down in deep and dark sea caves, far, far down and under
Bones of old Muskoka lie, lulled by the sea thunder.

BILL ADAMS.

Coal

By Bruce Beddow

"What was that horrible dream about? It escaped him, but he returned, fascinated, to the quest. Something horrible, some sound . . . Yes, that was it! Some queer sound, as if the world creaked. The thunder, of course. But something had been happening—something."

IF you had seen Josiah Clarke, Hendiford's oldest and busiest coal merchant, when his travellers returned with meagre orders, or when he sued a debtor, or when he haggled with a customer, it is almost certain that you would have reached the general conclusion, that his god was in a vault.

But this general conclusion was a wrong one. None had surprised his real aim. Even his wife, a taciturn woman who went about with pursed lips and narrowed eyelids, misunderstood his motive in living sparingly, in robbing his customers, and in sedulously banking his money. And his two daughters, sullen minxes whom many pitied but few admired, openly averred, in the absence of their father, that he was "an old screw."

But he knew himself, and knew to a nicety the end he aimed to reach. He was somewhere in the forties when the great ideal of his life first floated elusively through his thoughts. Certain sights, certain words began to move him strangely. As the years passed the elusive ideal gradually became less incoherent in its appeal, began to cohere, until one night, after attending the annual colliery garden party held, by Lord Chandos' permission, in the grounds of Chandos Hall, he had dreamed a strange dream and woke to find his ideal perfected. He became conscious of his desire.

And now, within three months of his sixty-fifth birthday, the ideal was not only imaginatively realized to the last detail, but it had materialized, materialized wondrously, without failure or hitch or disappointment to mar it from beginning to end! . . .

It stood upon Shoal Hill, the wooded hump that rises to the west of Canford Town, and it faced, across twenty miles of green and gold countryside, the spectral Wrekin upon the western horizon. It was there, elevated, visible to every eye. A very dream come true. A bodied creature of the imagination.

A house. . . .

Not, of course, an ordinary house. You came upon it as you breasted the hill from the town, and saw its brown tiles and white balconies and warm red brick between the trees. And, suddenly, the great double gates swung into view through which you might glimpse brick-red paths and green lawns and grey statuary and striped blinds above french windows; and upon the gates were carved, in Gothic characters, the words: "The Mansion."

Simple, sublime words.

"Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul," the poet sang. And the soul of Josiah Clarke, adjured in like fashion, its path smoothed by a fat cheque-book, had builded him this stately mansion upon Shoal Hill.

II

NOT that there was anything stately about Josiah Clarke.

By Bruce Beddow

As he sat in his garden upon a sweet May morning, feasting his eyes anew with the sight of his soul's handiwork, and looking very much like a coarse little auctioneer who, feeling ill, had crept in through the great gates, he was the antithesis of stateliness. He was very short and very stout, so short and stout that his little knees were tucked, as he sat, beneath his inordinate paunch. His head was leonine for so small a man, bald at the top, heavily bearded and moustached, with stumpy nose and tiny, pouched, ruthless eyes, that at present looked pleased but very tired, like the eyes of a newly-awakened child at sight of a toy. He looked unhealthy, flabby, and ill; his ill-cut clothes and heavy boots—he could not "abide" slippers — and out-of-date collar marked him as a provincial who had last dressed with conscious thought for his appearance in the 'seventies. He moved a flabby, veined hand, that trembled visibly, to a box of cigars upon a small table placed in the sunlight beside his invalid chair, and, lighting a cigar, he settled back comfortably in his chair to repossess all the glory of his mansion.

Solid, it looked, *solid*. That was the big thing. Of course, he liked its genteel air, and its obvious cost. And Heavens, *what* it had cost! He looked sullen for a moment as he thought of his depleted savings. But, after all, it was worth it. Yes, even to the last penny! . . . And all the years he had saved, the long years! A lifetime. Some men would have died after such a life of unremitting toil, died before they could build their mansion, died and never glimpsed such glory as was his. He shuddered at the thought of death. To die, to leave this great edifice of beauty for alien feet to enter, and alien hands to touch, and alien eyes to enjoy! It would be insupportable. But, of course, all this talk about strained hearts was bunkum. They did it just to get their fees, so that they could make many visits and pile up the account. But he would watch 'em! He'd watched men all his life, and there were few who could say they had "done" Josh Clarke. Not but that they'd tried, cuss 'em! Every one of 'em. Even Sarah. Where could she have found a better husband? Some men would have drunk their profits, and starved their children. But *his* children could never say they hadn't had enough. No! It had been plain, but good, and above all, cheap. Not that they'd liked it. He remembered Sarah coming in furtively, that night, with the pound of best butter under her coat. *Best* butter, mind! Heaven knows what they hadn't spent when his back was turned! He grinned unpleasantly. They hadn't been given much rope, though! It was his wife's fault that Emily and Muriel had pinched things. Of course! She'd encouraged 'em, the old fool! . . . And they weren't a bit grateful for the mansion. Not a bit! After all the work, all the scheming of his life, they were still ungrateful. Why, they ought to be off their heads with joy to *live* in such a house. But he was not disturbed at their coldness. It was Sarah's attitude that irritated him. She went about as if she lived there under sufferance! And somewhere there was still left a scrap of feeling for Sarah. She should have admired him, been proud of him, been willing to pinch and starve as he had been. But first there'd been rows, and when he finally established control of her, she looked at him and spoke to him as if she hated him. Yes! actually as if she hated him! Just like one of these dirty colliers.

A faint flush of anger ran through him at the memory of the colliers who had had the impudence in a strike to break into his offices and threaten to lynch him, because he had said things about them. And they had accused him of being one of the men whose profits strangled the industry. He hated their very presence. That was why he had

built his mansion on Shoal Hill, so that he might escape Hendiford, two miles away, and the collieries and the colliers. All the muck and slime, he thought contemptuously. But he must not excite himself, the doctor had said. 'Course, that was all rot. But still, it was best to be careful. Y'never know. And he was very tired.

The sun was growing warm, and a venturesome white butterfly idled about the lawn. Summer was in the air, advancing without hesitation. Sorrel reddened the meadows about the mansion, and from the edges of the drive came the honey-laden scent of wallflowers; the beeches that overhung the walls bore fresh fronds of leaves and little silk flowers, and over there, at the side of the house, there were banks of apple blossom and scattered stars of blackthorn, like microscopic snowdrops, and families of tiny yellow buds upon the laburnums. There was little sound save the summer sound of flies and the droning passage of a laden bee. Some scent there was in the air that recalled the vague days of his boyhood, some intangible recollection of hot, dirty hands and perspiring faces, and the cool air of the underwoods upon the brow. He turned his head. . . . (That rose was not coming on at all well. He'd been "jewed" over that.) Some scent. What was it? And a little breeze, heavily laden like the homing bee with honey, came over the road from the shimmering acres of bluebells in the woods. Of course! It was up in the pine woods on the Chase, or somewhere thereabouts! Sarah had been there. Yes, and Harry Hartshorne, and—and somebody else. He remembered Sarah, how she had been dressed in a soiled white "slip," and her yellow hair had fallen in gawky locks about the bunch of pale bluebell stems she had been tying. Why, he could even remember that there had been brown earth upon her lap, and how, when she smiled, she had lost a tooth and so was doubly interesting.

"Josh!" said her voice at his elbow.

He jumped, and turned, trembling, to find her beside him, a tall, thin woman with a hard, resentful face.

"Whady' mean by comin' up like that, sudden-like?" he asked in a frightened, angry voice, a voice that had grown hard and flat with constant haggling. "Y'might ha' know'd it 'u'd give me the jumps. Ooh!"

"What is it?" she asked with a semblance of concern.

"Nothin'!" he said angrily, while his hand clutched desperately at his throat.

"It's dinner-time," she said, referring to the midday meal. "Do y' feel like a bit?"

"No, I don't!" he replied, his voice suddenly falling to a weak murmur. "Leave me alone. I'm all right." Above his gasping he scanned her dress. "An' it's about time you got some decent clothes, an' dressed y'self decent. Not like *that*. It ain't right, to be knockin' about in them clothes afore a house like this-un. I wonder what folks 'ud say if they looked over the 'edge."

She glanced bitterly at the gate. "What does it matter?" she said. "I've been dressed like this for God knows 'ow many years. An' you've not noticed it. Dressing-up like what you want costs money."

He moaned a little. "Well, any-'ow, get a couple o' quid an' see what you can do. It ain't fair to me, fair to the place"—he swung a weak hand towards the mansion—"to be a-goin' about like that."

(Her hair was grey now, he saw, and very thin. Fancy, all *them* years!)

"Shall you come inside for some dinner?" she asked drearily.

He did not reply, and, glancing down, she saw that his head was turned.

"What is it?" she asked in alarm.

"Nothin'," he replied. And then, as if he had changed his mind: "Can't you smell somethin'? Over there, across the roads! Some-

thin'——" He hesitated with an incredible look of embarrassment.

She sniffed, disagreeably. "No," she said. "What's it like? Drains?"

He snorted, and was at once seized by some spasm of the heart. She bent to him, and gave him water from a decanter on the table. When he was breathing more easily: "You'll 'ave to 'ave the doctor again if it goes on like this . . ."

"No," he said weakly.

They were silent for some time, while his breathing became less laboured. She sniffed again.

"What sort o' smell did you mean?" she asked.

He hesitated again. "Sort of—sort of smell o' flowers, I think it is."

"Oh," she said vaguely. "But you'd better come inside an' 'ave some dinner."

"Not yet," he said faintly. "You go on an' get yours."

She replaced his cold cigar on the table and left him.

He closed his eyes, and seemed to be sleeping peacefully, but he opened them again and turned his head towards the road, weakly sniffing. A look of anger crept into his eyes. A face was looking through the gate, a black face. One o' them cussin' miners!

"Gerraway, blame yer!" he called weakly, waving a feeble arm. "'Op it!"

The black face grinned, hesitated a tantalizing minute, and then passed out of sight.

"Always lookin' through!" he growled to himself with bitter anger. "Shoving' their dirty faces through the palin', cuss 'em!"

As if *he* had anything to do with coal now! Hadn't he worked like a horse, selling coal and buying coal, and playing coal off against coal, during a lifetime? And when he'd built his beautiful mansion, built it far from coal and mucky colliers, then they pushed their faces through his palin's! That's all they were worth, just to get coal and lounge about people's gates. Not enough sense to *use* coal, as he had used it, to build themselves mansions like this beauty. Sense? They'd got no sense!

But his anger weakened, for he was very tired. He appeared to sleep, but again turned to quest that honey-laden scent with his nose. But he could not detect it now. That grinning black face disturbed him from quiet, and unsettled him. Again he closed his eyes with a little sigh like a tired child.

A moment later, the grinning face still obsessing his mind, he rang his bell, with some irritation, for Sarah to wheel him back into the mansion.

III

THERE was thunder and sheet lightning in the early hours of the following morning. He woke from a bad dream to see a purple flash upon the window, and to listen to the answering rumble of the thunder. He gasped, and attempted to rise from his bed, but weakness held him; he was impotent. What was that horrible dream about? It escaped him, but he returned, fascinated, to the quest. Something horrible, some sound. . . . Yes, that was it! Some queer sound, as if the world creaked. The thunder, of course. But something had been happening—something. He half dozed.

The face, of course! Yes, the face. It had got on his nerves, that black, grinning face. He was a fool to let things like *them* disturb him. And he would certainly be worse in the morning. This miserable heart trouble! He couldn't last much longer, he saw in these friendless small hours. To leave it, the house, to stranger hands . . . ! No, he *would* live! No one should reign there, in his mansion.

He must not excite himself, that was the first thing the doctor had said. No excitement and no exertion. He would go to sleep. But that face. He shuddered, and wiped his face with his hands, his

mouth bent weakly, like the mouth of a puling child.

Lightning blazed in at the window, and he cowered, anticipating the thunder. Would it never come? Perhaps it would not come. Perhaps some kinds of lightning——

Thunder cracked above his head, and he gasped like a drowning man.

The storm passed over about three o'clock, and again he slept, his face looking pinched and haggard in the eerie morning light. He was tucked up in bed, his head twisted upon his shoulder. His breathing was stertorous, and again and again his hands twitched. And outside in the dawning light the birds awoke, and the pleasant garden of the world was filled with their full-throated songs. A thrush upon the blackthorn called and called in mellow flutings, as if he would call the soul of Josiah Clarke back from the terrors of sleep to the happiness of the sunlit morning.

Light was barely upon the window when he again woke, and peered with alarm about the room. That noise again! And this time it could not be thunder. A sound, a queer tearing sound, that filled his soul with terrors. He glanced about the dim room, across the great bed, and as he paused, in mortal indecision, the sound came again, softly, steadily, with a faint suggestion of the sound of sand running into a heap. Burglars? Possibly . . .

But in his heart he knew that it was not, that this sound, this half-heard suggestion of sound, portended something that struck him to the heart, some vague, total disaster. It was nerves, of course. He must sleep.

A moment later he started up, the sound in his ears; and as if imbued with new life he slid down from the great bed, and, struggling into an overcoat, he went out upon the landing, calling, in mortal terror: "Sarah! Sarah, oh, Sarah!"

His voice died out on the dark landing, died out like the wail of the lost. Gasping and calling, he struggled to the stairs, and there he went down and struggled from step to step, upon his great stomach, like an animal. And he made noises, sobbing and whispering and pleading.

IV

A SCARED maid knocked at the door of Mrs. Clarke's bedroom at half-past seven.

"What do you say? Speak plain, girl!" said Mrs. Clarke.

"The master—in the garden!" gasped the frightened girl, nodding her head hysterically.

His wife found him on the lawn at the front of the house. He lay upon his face, his arm under his head, the night dew upon his coat, his night-shirt, and his beard. And a startled gasp from the maid caused Mrs. Clarke to glance up from the still figure that lay heedless of the thrush's song.

Across the front of the house, from the corner of the double-porticoed door, across the window of "the master's" bedroom, and from thence to the roof, ran a great crack in the brickwork. The tiles, even, were broken, and sagged precariously.

The pits had reached out a long tentacle, and silently, secretly, had sapped the foundations of the mansion. BRUCE BEDDOW.

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A SPLENDID NEW SERIES

Gayly, the Troubadour

By Frank H. Shaw

"A deep silence fell on the crowded restaurant as Gayly played on, his eyes fixed on the startled eyes of the stranger-girl. He saw a dozen emotions assail her expressive features—fear, hope, joy and sorrow all mingled there bewilderingly; but in her eyes was an expression that might have shown in the eyes of a lost soul on Heaven's glorious threshold."

III.—SALVAGE

OH, yes, the excellent Signor Gayly." The portly proprietor of the Soho restaurant remembered. "And the world goes well with you, signor?"

"None so badly. The grapes are ripening in the vineyards on Etna's slopes; and the wine at the Bella Vista is better than it was two years ago. I promised your mother I would convey her felicitations, if I saw you." Gayly added a few words in Sicilian, evidently a literal rendering of Gaspardo's mother's benediction.

"No, not you, Carlo," the proprietor said. "It is not seemly that an apprentice waiter should tend an excellency of this calibre. I myself——" The patrons of the Gancho del Oro opened their eyes when they beheld Gaspardo himself dusting a chair, arranging a cover, and generally bestowing on the slim, quiet youngster such service as is not always granted to princes of the blood royal.

"No, order nothing, excellenzia—leave yourself in my hands. And you are newly from Santa Christina? Ay, *mi!* There is a sunny wall, where the village wenches pause to gossip——"

"One, Giulia Mestrorna, made mention of your name, Gaspardo. I thought there were tears in her eyes."

Your Sicilian may be willing and even eager to seek fortune in alien lands, but always he suffers in exile from an abiding, if bravely concealed, nostalgia.

"Ay, little Giulia, eh! She has not forgotten. Mother of Mercies, I thank thee! Signor, I will at once place a bottle of my best Lachryma Christi on the ice—the sparkling Lachryma. It is better so." With a dozen pencil strokes and as many flourishes, Gaspardo concocted a menu that would have caused dead Lucullus to turn in his grave with watering mouth. As he wrote, Gayly chatted. He was newly returned from Sicily; sent there on some secret mission that the world must not know.

He mentioned scents and sights and sounds; he told the last broad jest that was current amongst the peasants who toiled on Etna's slopes. And he spoke in the patois of Santa Christina, which differs in certain respects from the patois of Syracuse or Catania; though certain of the waiters in the Taormina hotels use it when speaking comrade-wise amongst themselves. For here in London, Gayly, the troubadour, counted himself amongst friends, where was no need to affect an ignorance of every spoken language save honest-to-God English.

"For to-night, and all the nights,

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if your excellency so wills," Gaspardo said, with the olives, "this is your own place. Tell me a little more. It is now five years since I watched the figs ripen. Ay, me! and Giulia has remembered me? I was an undesirable in those days, signor; and now—now, I am Gaspardo. Giulia's father had other views; and she never wrote; but I feel a holiday is overdue."

"I mentioned that your especial dish is called Sole Giulia," Gayly said; "and she smiled through her tears."

"Is there aught one might do to render you comfortable, excellency? Some favourite tune the band might perform?"

"Yes—wait, I'll speak to the conductor myself."

The conductor came, listened, bowed and returned to his dais. He himself played the violin solo, and Gaspardo wept openly and unashamed. Gayly was conscious of a pleasurable contentment. Newly returned as he was from successful completion of a delicately difficult mission, rest amongst the fleshpots appeared desirable. He assured himself that the itch of adventure was allayed for the moment; he vowed that he would rediscover England. But the sobbing cadences of the violin created the beginning of a ferment that reminded him of romance and dangers past. His fingers tapped the table-cloth—and it was the restaurant's best square yard of linen—his feet beat slow accompaniment to the solo.

When the astonishing strains died away, like a broken heart sobbing through elfin laughter, there was no immediate applause. Even the most careless of the clients were thoughtful, tracing patterns on the table-cloths, staring dreamily before them. It was in this eloquent silence that the girl entered the Gancho del Oro. On the instant Gayly's interest was quickened. There was something more than commonly attractive about this girl, shabby of dress, beautiful of face. Her companion deserved nothing more than a casual glance: Gayly knew his type well enough. He was prosperously ponderous; a man with the jowl of a swine, possessive eyes and perfect teeth. Gayly's quick fancy likened him to a fowler who had after much labour trapped a coy, rare bird. The only vacant table in the Gancho del Oro now was that adjacent to Gayly's; with a lifted eyebrow Gaspardo invited his honoured guest's opinion. A frown from the troubadour must have dispatched the newcomers into outer darkness; but Gayly smiled and nodded very slightly. And in consequence the beautiful girl was placed vis-à-vis with him; her escort's broad back—curiously porcine, Gayly thought—not altogether interrupting the view.

"They are?" Eric Gayly asked, when Gaspardo bent down to invite his opinion of the Sole Giulia.

"Oh, that one—he is a *flaneur.*" The Sicilian word for the woman-hunter is much more expressive than the French. "As for the lady—I do not know; she is different, somehow, from his customary companions. This is the fourth time he brings her." Gayly, whose principal object in life it was to avoid entanglements with women; who dreaded always lest some fair maid should clip the wings of his buoyant freedom and sentence him to a life of commonplace monotony, scrutinized the girl more as a connoisseur might inspect a picture than if she were radiant flesh and blood. For women, so ran his varied experience, were inevitably the priestesses who guarded the alluring portals of romantic adventure. And this woman—a girl, indeed—held promise. That she was neither English, French nor Italian he was swiftly aware.

Catching his meditative eye she flushed faintly, looked down at her plate, and then spoke animatedly—too animatedly, Gayly thought—to her companion.

"Russian!" murmured the trou-

badour. He thought he saw beneath the animation a suggestion of that everlasting sadness that belongs by rights to the Northern races. And, slowly and appreciatively eating his way through the exquisite repast provided for him by Gaspardo—occasionally mentioning to Gaspardo little trifles of gossip from here and there—he discovered himself growing more than sufficiently intrigued. For this girl was quite unlike many of the Gancho del Oro's patrons. Her golden eyes lacked all evidence of sophistication. The majority of the babbling women who occupied the tables, all of them with escorts, were women with a definite object in life: that object the magnetizing of worldly wealth, either in the shape of actual coin of the realm, or jewellery or houses and position, from the pockets of their cavaliers. They were the chevalieresses of industry; none too scrupulous in the way they set about things; they were overly flamboyant, too lavish in their display of their charms. Modesty; a shrinking virginity was the outstanding characteristic of the stranger-girl. Gayly thought to see her mouth set in distaste as her escort leaned possessively across the table to pat her hand. A vast and consuming dislike for the porcine one, whose neck was ridged with pink and unpleasing flesh, attacked him. But, being a gentleman, he saw no excuse for interference—at least, not the marked interference his soul dictated. All said and done, the girl was there of her own accord: a willing victim of the fleshpots. He noticed she ate daintily but eagerly. Her attire, though shabby, betrayed evidences of a smart origin. Altogether, no little of an enigma, decided Gayly, the troubadour, whose self-appointed mission in life was the solution of human problems.

None the less, it irked to see her flutter in the spider's web; she was too rare a jewel to be handled by those podgy, freckled hands. The orchestra completed a lilting Viennese waltz; the conductor laid aside his magic violin.

"Is there anything else the signor could desire?" Gaspardo asked enticingly. "I have said the establishment is his. Maybe, later, over a liqueur, your excellency may see fit to tell me how the figs grow up the white walls of Santa Christina."

"With all the pleasure in life," Gayly said heartily. "Yes; there's one thing. Wait a minute." He rose swiftly; smiling his sweetest smile he slid to the dais, picked up the violin the conductor had laid down. It has been said that, next to languages, music was his chiefest accomplishment; and his knowledge of it was as catholic as his knowledge of human tongues. For counted seconds he whispered to the pianist; himself a Pole, received an affirmative nod; and then, casually, as if performing an action of everyday, he drew his bow across the strings, staring at the girl.

It was an air the pre-revolution Russian peasants sang at harvest time, and it was infinitely sweet. It seemed to carry in its gentle cadences the voices of children yet to be born; the sighing laughter of the maiden aware of her nearing womanhood; the deep-throated chaunting of ardent lovers. Through it, too, ran the chuckle of sun-kissed streams; the rustling of strong wind in ripe corn. A deep silence fell on the crowded restaurant as Gayly played on, his eyes fixed on the startled eyes of the stranger-girl. He saw a dozen emotions assail her expressive features—fear, hope, joy and sorrow all mingled there bewilderingly; but in her eyes was an expression that might have shown in the eyes of a lost soul on Heaven's glorious threshold.

"You've *got* to believe in me!" Gayly thought, and projected that thought through the music he was playing for her alone. The orchestra conductor, himself a musician of merit, was unabashedly weeping

into the hands that covered his working face. Then, as it were imperceptibly, the troubadour glided into a catchy lilt that might have charmed children's feet to dancing. Hope—strong and vigorous—sounded in the strains. With a sweeping chord he ceased, laid the fiddle aside and unconcernedly slipped back to his seat. But something had happened to the girl. She was soundlessly appealing to him, he knew—there was a call in her brimmed eyes. Her throat-muscles worked quickly, and when her cavalier bent forward to speak, his flesh-folds quivering like jelly, she raised an impatient hand. Gaspardo, intriguant that he was, sensed something of the emotional stress; serving faultless coffee he took opportunity to whisper:

"If the excellency desires an interview, doubtless it could be arranged."

It was the old, shudderful suggestion, nauseating to Gayly, who was a Galahad where women were concerned. He knew fleeting dislike for Gaspardo, but realized that he was merely acting according to his lights.

"I should like a word—but in public," he said.

"Ah, signor; as you will. Wait!" He disappeared; within a few moments a chasseur appeared, bent and spoke to the porcine one, who arose hastily, and with but a perfunctory excuse, wiped his jowl and ponderously trod his way to the exit. Gayly answered the invitation of the stranger-girl's face, and crossed to her table. Time was precious, he understood.

"If one who possibly understands might aid, mademoiselle," he said in a flawless Russian.

"Ah, but you do understand, sir," she whispered. "Perhaps you have saved me. Who are you that know that song of all songs?"

"A troubadour, desirous of aiding the afflicted. Mademoiselle, I am to be trusted; I entreat you to think—to remember. If I might be of service!" She was considering him, startled still, but with hope conquering the quivering fear of her expression. Gayly was different from the common run; and his difference was easily evident to discerning eyes. He mentioned a saying that had been current at the Tsar's Court before the war-clouds darkened Europe. It was a bon mot known only to the charmed few; almost as rigorously select as a masonic pass-word; he saw appreciation shine in those golden eyes.

"One of *us?*" she asked. He laughed—his immediate desire was to gain her confidence.

"Sufficiently so to ask your friendship and faith," he said. "Permit that I may arrange a meeting." He was well aware how short was his time. Gaspardo's excuse might keep the porcine man engaged for a few minutes, but beyond that——!

"It is not easy. Yet—wait. If you would be considerate enough to call at No. 17, Childergate Square."

"Yes, when? To-night?"

"I may not return until late, monsieur."

"No matter how late! Mention an hour."

"At midnight, then?"

"Good. And, until then, do nothing you may regret." She flashed a glance of gratitude at him, and Gayly returned to his coffee that appeared to have gained in flavour. Just in time, for the girl's companion was returning, exclamatory even before he reached her. There had been a mistake—a wrong telephone call; the dunderheads ought to be pickled alive, he said. Gayly finished his coffee and spent a pleasurable hour with Gaspardo in his private room, where he recreated Sicilian impressions to the proprietor's infinite content. He also elicited unpleasing information concerning the porcine one, who rejoiced, it appeared, in the name of Major Spottiswood Edkins. He was a man of vast possessions and animal appetites, who prided

himself on his many conquests. The patent-leather-shod feet of Eric Gayly itched to kick him; he trembled a little for the stranger-girl's fate, but found reassurance in remembrance of her expression when he played that little folk-song of her native land. For there is nothing equal to music for uplifting the soul in moments of crisis.

He was disconcerted, however, when he presented himself at 17, Childergate Square on the edge of midnight, for the square was a sordid slum. It was a hive of drunken, quarrelling women whose voices shrilled stridently; an iniquitous blot on London's fair name. Varied stenches assailed his nostrils; but he reflected philosophically that fair flowers frequently grow in noisome stews. No. 17 was perhaps the coarsest of the dwellings in the square. A thoroughly intoxicated British working man, whose most arduous employment must have been the drawing of his weekly dole, thrashed his wife purposefully under the windows. Gayly longed to interfere, but had learnt by experience the futility of such experiment. He tapped on the door of No. 17, but received no response. Consequently he waited, effacing himself in a comparatively secluded alley, whose denizens were probably drunkenly asleep. The taxi-cab stopped near his position.

"No, this is far enough," he heard the girl say in deliciously broken English. The porcine Major Edkins alighted and handed her out. He surveyed the square with dislike, and touched his wide nostrils with a handkerchief that Gayly realized was scented. He detested scent-using men as he detested poisonous vermin.

"Well, we'll soon alter all this," Major Edkins said. "Make it seem like nothing but a bad dream. Here—give me a kiss, Katrina!" But she eluded his possessive arm and danced swiftly across the square, whereat the major swore, and only with difficulty did the unseen Gayly resist an impulse to floor him. He waited until Edkins had re-entered the taxicab and clattered away before again tapping on the door of No. 17.

"Ah," the girl whispered, her hand to her breast, "then it was not a jest?" She opened the door wider, Gayly accepted the invitation, and entered a mean apartment. As the door closed he gravely stooped and carried the girl's fluttering hands to his lips. He quoted a Russian proverb to the effect that no swimmer allowed himself to sink so long as there was a floating plank within reach.

"Acquit me of impertinence," he entreated. "Let us be brief. I can be trusted with the truth. You are of holy Russia, a refugee—that I know. Poor, that I also know. But very beautiful, mademoiselle—dangerously so, for yourself. I speak frankly, for I understand the dark vampires that beckon from the dirty corners."

"Oh, it is not for myself, not for myself!" she said. "Wait—please come." She opened a blistered door that swung unevenly on rusted hinges. The bed within held an elderly woman who had once perhaps been as beautiful as Katrina herself. Of a patrician loveliness at that, though suffering starvation even had emaciated her and sunk her burning eyes.

"My mother—the Countess Starzinka," Katrina said. "Mamma, here is a friend—at last." Gayly, aware of the piercing scrutiny of eyes that had gazed on much sin and sorrow, smiled, stooped to the skeleton hand.

"I think I understand," he softly said. "Pray God I might be in time!"

"Oh, as for that, you saved me, sir—for to-night." Gayly held open the door for the girl to enter the living-room. He handed her to a chair, and then, seizing his hat, vanished. He was impulsive, and worked in a fashion to make quicksilver envious. When he returned

he carried with him rare loot from a late open restaurant. He had suffered starvation himself on occasion and knew the symptoms.

"After your mother is refreshed will be time to talk," he said.

"But it is not so bad as might appear," Katrina stated. "He asked me to be his wife."

"That's a nasty habit he's got, so one hears. Let's hope he meant it in your case. I have my doubts. Even so, marriage, dear lady, with him!"

"Oh, you cannot understand! Listen—we are penniless. I had work, of a sort—it sufficed to keep body and soul together in this house. In this house, sir! Where my dear mother must live in hell's torment during the hours of my absence. We are like so many others—thankful for bare life. But I am dismissed from my employment. I do not know why."

"Probably Major Edkins knows," suggested Gayly. "There are various ways of snaring birds. I gather that it is a favourite trick of his to mark down a lady, to discover all about her, and then cause her to be dismissed. Afterwards—honeyed words sound sweeter to a starving woman than a full-fed one. I may be wrong, though I am generally right."

"It was for my mother's sake I listened. She is so ill, she has suffered so much—during the terror and afterwards. She saw my father bayoneted—slashed to pieces. She was robbed of everything save only bare honour. Oh, the horrors! But I brought her to England here—I worked for her. She herself could work a little then, but the terrors she had endured wrought on her. It was hard, but it was possible to live. We had no friends."

"You have one now, though. You must promise me to listen no more to the blandishments of Major Spottiswood Edkins. Don't marry him, even—he's not clean. And pearls don't mate with swine."

"But—but—my mother, sir? You see, our surroundings—listen!" A bitter-tongued virago was volleying unmentionable filth outside the window. Someone apparently threw water on her from an upstairs window. There was the crash of a broken pane. "There is no sacrifice too great to enable her to leave this cesspit," Katrina said bitterly.

"Yes—there are some too great even for that. But it should be possible to secure you a better place, better employment. I have friends."

"It would not be so terrible if we had not lost all," shuddered the girl. "If only her jewels could be found."

"Stolen?"

"No, sir, hidden. Hidden in Bolshevik Russia! My father concealed them before he was slaughtered. My mother had no opportunity to secure them. They are lost—lost." And immediately Eric Gayly's interest quickened.

"Tell me," he entreated, and his manner must have charmed a dying bird back to life.

So she told him, and it was a story only too common in these days when might has usurped the place of right. Her father a gallant man, her mother a proud woman, highly esteemed in that ill-fated court that ceased so tragically to exist. Moneyed, accustomed to the softnesses of life, the swift and reckless revolution had altered it all. It swept over the Starzinka family in headlong torrent; it tore down their stronghold; it steeped the foundations in blood. It plucked them from their high pedestal and hurled them, bruised and amazed, into the foulness of a revolutionary prison. It was only by dint of bribing a kommissar with her sole remaining fragment of jewellery that the countess contrived an escape with her daughter, then a child. During their wanderings their sufferings had been incredible. Had Katrina not contrived to disguise herself as a boy her fate must have been unspeakable.

And now, after it all, there

seemed to the girl no way of saving her mother from this continued degradation save by the bartering of her own sweet flesh to a human vulture. Fascinated by her rare loveliness, Major Edkins had made golden promises of a sweet haven apart from unseemly clamour where existence might be idyllic under shelter of his name. Shrinking, she had forced herself to consider the sacrifice—nay, she had rejoiced in her capacity for making that sacrifice. Her mother, by self-sacrifice and suffering, had brought the girl unsmirched from the Russian hell. This debt must be repaid at all costs.

"We'll see about that!" said Gayly. "Tell me where the jewels were concealed." Once again the irresponsible spice of adventure tantalized him. Leisure had been granted him after his Sicilian devoir; much concrete profit had accrued to him, as may be narrated in a seemly place.

"My mother shall tell you, though nothing can be gained. Why do you ask?"

"I have my reasons. But, meantime, arrangements must be made. Listen, mademoiselle, I am a troubadour—a fairy godfather. I shall wave my wand and all this will be changed. Your mother is ill; she will die in this slum. You shall not marry the unpleasant Edkins, of that I am very certain."

"But he will discover me; he will compel me. I—I promised to permit him to—to ask me again to-morrow. You do not understand the temptation. I have been so hungry and so weary, sir. And to-morrow—which is to-day——"

"We'll see about that," Gayly consoled her. "But you must trust me." He was ever irrational in his actions, though generally there was a purpose behind. He elicited from Katrina a promise to avail herself of his aid for her mother's sake, and left her under an impression that he was about to secure her immediate employment. He wasted no time. Much can be done by a determined man who refuses to recognize obstacles. Eric Gayly went to his own rooms, which were merely a temporary resting-place for his restless feet, changed from evening clothes, engaged a powerful motor, and busied himself. By eleven o'clock that morning the powerful car halted at the entrance to Childergate Square. By eleven-thirty the countess and Katrina were assisted into the car, which sped smoothly away from London's dinginess and halted outside a picturesque cottage in wonderful scenery on the Surrey hills. Katrina clapped her hands.

"It is like our Russia," said the girl.

"It struck me that it might remind you of your old home," agreed Gayly. "But with only a short time at one's disposal it is possible to make mistakes. The rent of this furnished cottage is paid in advance for three months. Here is a small sum of money on which to support existence." He dug a thick wad of Treasury notes from his pocket.

"But, sir, we cannot accept all this!" Katrina protested, what time her mother inhaled deep breaths of amazing air. The peculiar charm of the cottage was its isolation—no extraneous sound was to be heard save the occasional chirp of a bird and the whisper of wind in the pine tree-tops.

"Oh, it's only a loan," Gayly laughed. "Not being an Edkins I make no conditions, except that you shall repay me when you secure the buried jewels."

"That will be never."

"Don't be too sure. I'm going to look for them now. If the countess can spare me a moment to describe the hiding-place in detail, I will set about the job at once." And after five minutes' talk, Eric Gayly entered the powerful car again and headed briskly Londonwards. His holiday, he told himself, had commenced.

Gayly, the Troubadour

By way of a tramp steamer he landed in Russia: not the Eric Gayly of the London night-clubs, but a pallid, embittered Communist newly returned from America. He spoke Russian with a pronounced Yankee accent, and declaimed to the officials who questioned him on the iniquities of the Land of the Free. Those officials considered him more than a little mad, but accepted him as a useful doctrinaire. On the night of his arrival he delivered a lecture to three thousand souls, and little by little, as he passionately spoke, the Yankee accent dropped from him and he spoke pure Russian as it is spoken in the Volga provinces. It is a useful accomplishment to be able to speak every civilized tongue with its local inflections.

Bolshevik officials who heard were not quite sure whether to have him assassinated or to offer him a post as propagandist. He solved their problem for them by quietly disappearing, and reappeared, after a lapse of days, at Kuritsk, which is not so far from Moscow as to be noticeable. Here he won a fair amount of popularity by singing in the cafés to his own guitar accompaniment. It was only after the glasses had been refilled several times, and the men who would create a desert and call it freedom were mellowed, that Gayly commenced tentatively to sing memory-quickening songs of a day when happiness reigned in Russia. For, not particularly desirous of paying his own expenses in this quest, he had spared a moment or two to consult with that branch of the British Foreign Office which, understanding his qualifications, employed him on obscure missions. And there he had been told certain things, there he had been encouraged to seek information where its value was highest.

Chiefly he lived amongst the people, sleeping on the tops of brick stoves in over full rooms. One evening, however, as he chatted with hard-eyed men in a drinking shop of no repute whatsoever, a sunken-eyed kommissar entered the den, and in a rasping, intolerable voice demanded refreshment.

"Who is this one?" Gayly asked, lightly fingering the strings of his guitar.

"Ah, that is Prilskoff! He is very zealous for the cause," he was told, in such whispers as men use when they go in fear of their lives. "But a bitter man—desirous of advancing himself. He is a flaming sword." Details followed, what time Prilskoff absorbed glass after glass of stomach-inflaming raw spirit. Gayly remembered that the Countess Starzinka had mentioned an individual of the name of Prilskoff as being amongst the leaders of her persecution. He had been steward to the murdered count, knew his wealth. He had, moreover, cast desirous eyes on Katrina, although she was but a child in the days of the Terror. Gayly conceived a gnawing dislike for Prilskoff; but apparently this dislike was not reciprocated, for the kommissar invited the troubadour to join him in refreshment. The man, though slightly inebriated, was clever—Gayly admitted that. Under the veil of casual conversation he subjected Gayly to a searching cross-examination. Twice he tripped him, accentuating his successes by a stabbing, nail-bitten forefinger. Probably the fellow was half-mad; his coal-black eyes told something of his mental disturbances.

"You're a man after my own heart," he presently exclaimed. "Come, comrade, I'll wager you've an axe to grind. Accompany me to my small cottage—I am only a minor kommissar—and we will talk." Gayly made sure that a concealed automatic was ready to his hand ere accepting the invitation. He had no liking for Prilskoff; but, in view of the task that lay ahead of him, he wished to stand well in his good graces.

"You are intelligent—not like

these clods," Prilskoff said, as they left the place of refreshment, where tired-eyed women danced uncouth and shameless dances for the edification of the patrons. "Maybe, too, you are ambitious and can understand a man's ambition."

Gayly quoted a Russian tag to the effect that the crowns of the world were not always worn on the most deserving heads. Prilskoff chuckled unholily.

"Listen," he said, lurching a little in his gait. "I see myself the future President of the Soviet. Lenin—he was a dreamer. Trotsky—pah! My Russia shall rule the world. All that is necessary is that I should have money at my command."

"It is a good thing, money," Gayly agreed. "For myself, I have never possessed much beyond the price of a bed and a meal."

"I can make you rich. You are clever, as I am clever. Listen—I have at my mercy at this moment one who might prove of use. A servant, he was, of the Starzinkas; and he aided the Starzinka, whom I was instrumental in depriving of life, to conceal jewels of untold value." Gayly licked his lips—they had suddenly gone dry—and remembered the stories the countess had told him. For the kommissar he knew only loathing.

"I propose to put him to the torture, this serf. But the folk hereabouts—pah! They will not lend a hand. You are a stranger."

"And how did you know that?" Gayly asked.

"Oh, a trifle. I am cunning, and I asked you a question. You did not perceive my drift. We are not fond of strangers here. Come, then—bear a hand with this fellow, and there'll be no questions asked. A small matter of hot irons."

"And if I refuse?"

"Comrade, being a wise man, you will not refuse. I am only a district kommissar at present, but even so I have power. There are guards who kill at my bidding. Now, let us see this fellow and secure from him the secret of the hiding-place." Gayly realized that his continued existence might be hanging by a thread. It would, of course, be an easy matter to shoot this kommissar out of hand; but—he had his escape to think of. With half Russia in chase behind him his freedom was problematical. He had, moreover, pledged himself to secure the jewels and win the Starzinka women back to their old estate. It was necessary to play a careful game.

"Well, lead on to the torture chamber!" he said. The kommissar laughed coarsely, an entirely unlikeable man.

"This way, then!" he said, and guided his companion to a cottage. A soldier slumbered outside the door, his bayoneted rifle nursed in his arms as it were an infant. He got clumsily to his feet at sound of their footfalls, made a slovenly travesty of a salute. The kommissar opened the door and invited Gayly to enter.

It was in a damp and disgustful cellar they found the man who had once been Count Starzinka's trusted servant. The raw spirit he had imbibed, mounting to the kommissar's brain, made him pot-valiant. He reached a whip—a terrible tool—from the wall and swished it nastily through the air.

"To-night, Petro Petrovinck, you speak," he threatened, and drew the cutting lash across the man's shoulders. "The hidden jewels—where are they concealed?"

"I will not tell," the fellow said stubbornly. At that the kommissar appeared to lose all control of himself. Gayly caught the thrashing arm and held it; he was strong as an ox, despite his seeming slimness.

"Gently, gently!" he urged. "A dead man tells nothing. The irons, gently applied, eh?—they are better!"

"Good; you are clever. I go to fetch them." And whilst the kommissar was absent Gayly bent over the writhing servant.

"The jewels; they have not been moved?" he asked quickly. "I am from England, I—from the countess and little Katrina." He softly hummed that tune which had held Katrina back from a perilous brink, and intelligence showed in the man's mistrustful eyes.

"The jewels are where they were hidden," he muttered.

"Good! They shall go to the countess, on my honour as an Englishman. You, too, maybe. Be brave, grasp opportunity. Say nothing, however great your fear."

"Nay, I am dumb." The kommissar returned, towing behind him a brazier. Into it, Gayly aiding, he piled wood and kindled it. He thrust in iron rods, and chuckled vilely.

"For myself, my stomach sours," Gayly said. "Come, Comrade Kommissar, whilst the irons are heating, let us drink again." And the kommissar, already feeling the chill that follows on a too-free indulgence in alcohol, consented. The servant was securely bound; there was no need to fear. Gayly led the way to a drink-shop he had noticed, whence had come the sound of quarrelsome men. He bought drink for his companion, whom the intoxicated peasant folk treated with respect—the respect of fear. It was not until several of the small thick glasses had been emptied that Gayly, the troubadour, commenced to play on the small guitar he carried with him. Primarily he played tuneless but blood-maddening revolutionary airs, and it was only gradually that he drifted, as it were by accident, into ancient, monarchical airs. It was a subtle exhibition of craftiness; but he saw one or two of the drinkers prick their ears. The kommissar nodded over the rough-hewn table and Gayly began to sing.

Little by little, with deft jests introduced, he informed his listeners—they were listening intently now—of the wrongs they had suffered at the hands of this sunken-eyed fanatic. He mentioned that one of themselves had been thrashed to ribbons by this man—in the sacred name of freedom. He mentioned that hot irons were even now preparing for the torture. Then he spoke—with a mournful cadence that stirred the emotional hearts of the Russian peasants—of the good man dead—that Count Starzinka who had fed them when they starved and tended them in their sickness.

The kommissar aroused at that, lifted a pallid face, stared at Gayly with piercing eyes.

"A traitor!" he hiccoughed.

"Hark! That one called me a traitor!" said the troubadour; and it was an unwashed and fiercely bearded peasant who hurled the first stone mug at the kommissar. After that the drinking-shop became a shambles. The kommissar pulled a revolver and shot; but they were too many for him. Gayly did not see the finish of it. He was back in the cottage, cutting the bonds of the imprisoned servant, heartening him with words of good cheer.

Before the dawn broke he and his companion had secured the buried jewels. So far as he could tell, little Katrina and her mother were freed from the irk of penury. All that remained was to bring the treasure out of Russia.

"She'll be glad, little Katrina," Gayly thought. "So will the Foreign Office—when they hear the kommissar is dead."

Frank H. Shaw.

(Another story in this series next month.)

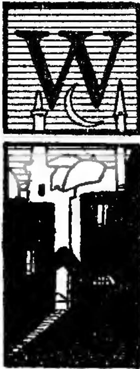
The Little Magazine with the Bright Stories—

The **P.M.** every Monday, **2d.**

A Different Country

By Josephine Daskam Bacon

"Glaring, quivering, menacing, he stood in their path, shaking his fists, and suddenly in the awful realization, screaming at them, urging them, cursing them. His voice echoed down the empty road, but they never turned their heads. They neither heard nor saw him . . ."



WHEN Everitt came to himself he was leaning against a tree. It was all a daze to him at first; his hands, clasped round the rough bark, surprised him, his legs shook.

"How did I get over here?" he puzzled.

Suddenly he remembered; his mental operations had always been very quick.

"Oh, yes; the accident," he thought, his brain working with an almost creaky attempt to co-ordinate. "But we went over, didn't we? The car tipped, certainly. How did I ever fall clear? And at that speed, too! They sideswiped us, besides. To think of me getting up and walking! For heaven's sake!"

He loosened his grip on the tree and turned himself cautiously. No bones broken? His head all right? No blood, even? Amazing! His coat, a heather-grey mixture, was not dusty; his green cardigan was still neatly buttoned. His grey cap was on his head, even.

His eyeballs turned slowly, like his body and his brain, but no wonder. Yes, there was the car on the bank, and only half over; it had rested on a great boulder.

"Lord, if I'd struck that!" he muttered.

Where was Elsie, then? George wouldn't be able to speak to him, he supposed, after this, if he'd killed his wife and saved himself. He took a few feeble steps forward, for the shock that had sent him so far had left him very uncertain, and saw, streaming out from the tonneau, a light brown motor coat; a woman's arm and hand flung out along the grass. His heart stopped.

"It's all over with her, I'm afraid," he muttered. "I must go and see. Did the brute get away? Ditch us like that and run off; and his fault too? That cursed Frenchman!" He swore.

But as he went towards the car two men suddenly ran up over the brim of the bank. One he recognized for the driver of the car that had hit them, the other he had never seen. They were talking loudly to each other, so nervous that they didn't realize that they were screaming at the same time.

"Pull her out! Tip her back, there! Get away, can't you? Look out; don't jar her!" they cried in a confused babble. "Hold on to his head—there comes Harry—easy now, Harry; easy with him!"

"Then they're English, too," he thought. "That's good."

A third man hurried up with a motor rug over his arm.

"His head? Whose head?" Everitt wondered. "Did we get one of them?"

He was now within five yards of the car, but he couldn't call out to them; he hadn't the strength. As he watched them they leaned into the front seat, and in a sudden silence lifted out, with a really remarkable deftness and care, the body of a man.

"Who's that?" Everitt muttered, so confused now that in the effort to remember who had been with them he dug his fingers into a small tree

on the edge of the little grove. They laid the body on the rug, and it lay motionless, a tall man in a heather-grey suit with a green cardigan and a grey cap. His face was pure white; from his forehead a narrow stream of blood still flowed down the cheek.

"Wh-wh-why, that's me!" he gasped, and suddenly a violent nausea threatened him. He turned away his eyes. In the silence a man's voice came clearly across to him.

"Well? Any—any chance for him?"

"Nothing. He's gone, poor chap. Head crushed. Let's have a look at the woman." She groaned.

Everitt forced his eyes towards them. They took off their hats for a moment, looked at the body, and moved back to where the third man was pouring something from a flask into Elsie's mouth. Her arm moved and she groaned again.

"She's alive all right, sir," the man cried joyfully.

Everitt turned his arm round the little tree and swayed there.

"I'm dead, then! I'm dead!" he mumbled.

The man on the rug lay stiff and motionless. The afternoon light fell in wide fanlike beams through the strange green trunks of the trees; all the trees in France had that green theatrical quality, as if they had stained them to make them more decorative. He stood there, his arm round one of those trees, his feet on the ground, all carpeted with the thick rich green of the ivy, his hat on his head, the breath in his lungs. And yet he was dead.

"It's like that, then," he thought. "It's like that!"

He left the tree and walked, a little shakily but with perfect ease, up to the car.

"What are they going to say when they see me?" he wondered. "It's bound to give them a turn! But I can't help it—I must tell them who I am. I must help about Elsie."

They were lifting her carefully into the car, and it occurred to him that he must not risk shocking them just then. Their backs were turned towards him, and he halted.

"The spine seems to be all right," said one of the men, "and she's moved both her arms. Thank the Lord I had a lot of this to do in '17. Of course there may be anything internally—anything. You can't tell. But she was thrown clear, you see. He was jammed in, poor devil."

Elsie was lying now on the back seat of a heavy limousine; she groaned steadily and moved her head. Everitt stepped up to them.

"I beg your pardon," he said, his voice trembling, "but I——"

"Wouldn't you know there'd be nobody on the road?" said the man. "It's like this in France. Let's pick that poor fellow up and send him on with Henry."

"Look here!" cried Everitt irritably, putting his hand firmly on the man's shoulder. "Will you please listen to me a minute? I'm——"

"All right, Harry, we'll help you," said the man, moving his shoulder from Everitt's grip. "Get right into Paris, I would; give 'em names and numbers and everything. It was certainly his fault, poor fellow; he never even sounded his horn."

"Will you listen?" cried Everitt, stamping on the road and moving in front of them. "What's the matter with you? Don't you see me? Are you crazy?"

"Easy does it, sir," said the chauffeur, picking up the legs of the body on the ground. "Take the hands up, will you, mister? It's not so bad if we can save the lady."

Glaring, quivering, menacing, he stood in their path, shaking his fists, and suddenly in the awful realization, screaming at them, urging them, cursing them. His voice echoed down the empty road, white between its poplars, but they never turned their heads. They neither heard nor saw him, though

he struck them, raging; nor could they feel his hands, though he tried to wrench their own away from the body they were carrying. He whirled about and fell, senseless, in the ditch by the road.

When he came to himself he was quite alone. All that violence and terror might have been one of the horrid nightmares that had occasionally haunted his childhood. He felt curiously calm, and recognized in himself a definite interest in the situation.

"How long will this last?" he wondered. "How about—heaven and all the rest of it? Not that it was ever very sensible, all that! Aha, here comes somebody!"

Two peasants, a man and a woman, were walking down the road, approaching him. He waited till they were close enough, then stepped out and spoke.

"*Bonjour, monsieur et madame!*" he said pleasantly, but they went past him, chattering; the woman had looked squarely into his eyes. With a great effort of the will he hurried ahead, and forced himself to stand straight in their path; in a moment they were on the other side of him, without, apparently, touching him at all.

He wiped his forehead, which was wet, and put back the handkerchief into his pocket.

"Well," he said, "that's that! Now where do we go from here? Have I got to walk back to Paris? I certainly don't see much point in hanging about this road all night! There's another woman; I don't think I'll bother about her, thank you!"

She had entered the main highway from the crossroad just beyond and, without glancing in his direction, hurried on ahead of him. Not a Frenchwoman, evidently; there was something in the stride, in the way of holding the body, the poise of the head, even, that showed the Anglo-Saxon. And she carried her clothes very well for an Englishwoman. What on earth was she doing seventy-five kilometres and more from Paris, walking along the highway?

He caught up with her easily and, moved by an odd cynical impulse, put his hand on her shoulder.

"I know you can't see me, my dear girl," he said dryly, "but what on earth are you doing, all alone, I wonder?"

To his utter amazement she whirled about under his light touch and faced him, scarlet with anger.

"*Monsieur!*" she cried. "*Prenez garde!*"

Automatically, or he had nearly fallen under the double shock of her reception and her quick strong thrust, he pulled off his cap and moved away from her.

"I beg your pardon," he said faintly; "you must forgive me. I didn't realize. You can see me then?"

"See you?" she echoed, amazed, and the anger faded out of her eyes. A real terror dawned in them.

"She thinks I'm a lunatic!" he said to himself. "How horrible! And perhaps I am—to have had such a nightmare back there. I was probably crazy from shock. Oh, how can such things be?"

"See you?" she said again, and he marvelled at her quick recovery, her brave attempt to smile and conciliate him, her lightning glance all about them to see if any help was probable. "But why shouldn't I see you? You're an Englishman, aren't you? Do you know where we are? Is it far from Paris? I've managed to lose myself."

He could have jumped up and down and waved his cap for joy. And he had thought—he had thought —— Oh, the relief, the heavenly relief!

Still keeping a careful distance from her he answered, his voice trembling a little.

"We can't be far off Chartres," he said. "I'm a bit confused myself, to tell you the truth. I was—I was in a nasty little motor accident, and got spilled, and I've been tumbling

around here like—like a sort of lunatic, trying to find out where I was and—who I was, if you can understand at all; and nobody seemed to pay any attention to me, and I got sort of—sort of—well, you'll have to excuse me, madam, that's all I can say. I'm not an apache nor a robber nor a lunatic, really, and I trust you'll believe that I haven't the remotest intention of doing you the least bit of harm in the world!"

She drew a long breath.

"I'm quite sure you haven't," she answered quietly. "You've had a bad shock, evidently. The peasants here are awfully rude if they don't understand you, you know. Here come some children, now; we'll——"

"Would you mind asking them?" he muttered, shaking. "I simply can't bear——"

"That's all right," she interrupted hastily. "I'm quite at home in French; I went to school here. Don't bother. It will be all right."

Five or six children were hurrying towards them, the girls in funny little red-and-blue jackets, the boys in sober black pinafores. She stepped out to them, extending her hand with a bright fifty-centime piece well in evidence between her thumb and finger.

"*Dites-donc, mes petits; comment ça va?*" she said cheerfully. "*Bonjour, tout le monde!*"

They ran on, chattering, with not so much as a glance for the tall grey-eyed woman in the long tan silk coat.

"*Attention, mes enfants!*" she cried, and moving lightly, with a long step, she stopped, ahead of them, opened her arms and caught the first two, a boy and a girl, as they ran. In a moment, without stopping, they appeared again, behind her back.

She stood there alone, her arms still extended, her face white and wondering; and Everitt, with an awful pang of pity and horror, ran to her and caught her as she staggered.

So that was it, then! That was why she saw him, spoke to him, felt him! Because she was like him; because——

"It's not possible!" he cried, and led her, leaning on him, to the roadside.

"What is it? Why wouldn't they—what isn't possible?" she asked confusedly. "What makes you look at me like that? Weren't they horrid? Oh, there! There comes a car. Stop it, will you?"

"Wait," he said gently; "wait a moment. I'll—I'll have to explain to you. No, it won't do any good; I couldn't stop them. They wouldn't see us, you see."

"They wouldn't see us? Why wouldn't they see us?"

"Because—because they're not like us. They're—they're different."

"Different? How are they different? Are you—are you——"

"No, I'm not crazy," he said; "I was never saner in my life. It's hard to tell you. Can't you remember anything, then? Can't you think what's happened to you? Don't you know?"

"What? What?" she whispered, turning her eyes up to him like a frightened child. "What is it you mean?"

"They're not like us," he said, very low, holding her hands firmly. "They're alive, you see; and we——"

"We——"

"We're dead, my dear," he said, and caught her as she swayed over on him.

Her head, casqued in the tight little sport hat of the moment, lay easily on the bank, and he ran for the little brook that flowed on the edge of the wood, filled his cap with water and dabbled her forehead and cheeks with it.

"She may not thank me for that," he muttered grimly; "but there, she's so pale. There's none of that beastly paint to wash off!"

Soon she began to draw long sobbing breaths, and he braced himself for whatever scene might occur; but

there was to be none, it seemed, for she only smiled faintly at him and put out her hand. Her hair, not brown, not red, not yellow, but a little of all three, was precisely the colour of her long curved eyebrows; her clear skin was very slightly flecked with tiny freckles, on her cheek bones, the tip of her nose, her chin. Her mouth was not small, but deeply curved and of a clear pink, rather than red. He judged her to be twenty-eight or thirty. She was not beautiful, certainly, perhaps not even handsome, by the exacting standards of his native country; but, on the other hand, she was certainly not plain. Interesting—was that it?

As she looked vaguely at him a soft rosy tint climbed over the pallor of her unconsciousness, and when she smiled he saw that to anyone who loved her she would be lovely.

"So it's just you and me?" she said gently, and he realized with relief that it was over with her and there was nothing more to fear.

"Just you and me," he repeated, holding her hand firmly and helping her to sit up beside him. "Haven't you any idea when it happened? Not if you don't feel like talking about it, of course——"

"But why not?" she asked calmly. "Only I can't see any sense in it, you know. There wasn't any accident. We were in the car, Jack and I—my brother-in-law—and he stopped, because he heard a knock. He got under the hood, and I stepped out a little ahead, to see the view, and—and that's all. I don't remember any more."

"But surely you did something; something happened. Was nobody else there?"

"No," she answered, thinking. "I was all alone on the road. There was a big sort of cable—wire or something—lying across the road, and I stooped down and picked it up, to throw it——"

"Ah, that's it!" he cried. "It was a charged wire! The storm last night! Oh, why did you do it?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"You think so?" she said quietly. "Yes, I suppose that was it. It never occurred to me, of course. And I was so angry when I found myself all alone in the wood; I thought Jack must have gone crazy, for he never even called after me! I was stupid, of course, and more or less shocked, for I just hurried on, to try to catch up with him." She sighed, straightened her hat, and rose, her hand still in his. "Shall we go on?" she said, and they walked on together. "How did it come to you?" she asked, and he told her briefly.

"And I must get back to Paris and find out about Elsie," he added; "she—she may have—— Only, how on earth are we going to get there?"

A little quiver ran through the hand he held, and glancing at her he saw that she was laughing.

"My father would have said we ought to fly there," she began, laughing outright now. "With crowns on our heads, and those ugly tea-gowns angels wear!"

"Don't be absurd!" he urged her, laughing and embarrassed. "I couldn't wear a tea-gown!"

"You'd have had to, according to father," she persisted, "but I can quite see that you'd look odd if you did."

Her spirits sank suddenly; she shivered and fell silent.

They were now in sight of a little wayside station for petrol and oil, and as they neared it she began to walk more quickly.

"I don't see why——" she began, and paused.

"What?" he asked. "Tell me!"

"If there should be a car with nobody in it why couldn't we get in and ride to Paris?" she said slowly. "If nobody sees us?"

He shrank a little.

"I'm afraid that might not be practical," he began, but she laughed again, a strange little laugh.

"Practical?" she said briefly. "What is practical—for us?"

"You may be right," he answered after a moment. "I'll try anything you say."

They stood by the door, listening to the gossip of the woman who rested near the tank, moving instinctively out of the way of the boy who tidied the little courtyard. After a few minutes of silence she began to talk hardily, and though it made him very nervous he tried to answer her, staring curiously at the boy all the while, who paid not the slightest attention to the strangers at his side, but swore softly at the *patron* who would not advance his wages by one night.

"And to think," Everitt burst out irritably, "that I have a thousand francs in my pocket! And they're no good at all!"

"But they're not real francs, you see," she said patiently.

"They're as real as I am!" he cried angrily.

"Are they?" she asked, and looked at him oddly.

He seemed to lose himself in her eyes, and the objects about them appeared to swing and sway. He forced his eyes away.

"Don't do that," he begged huskily, and took her hand; it was firm and warm.

A big French car swung up and halted; it was a luxurious sedan, quite empty. The chauffeur got down, opened the door, took out a box of matches from a little case, and left the door swinging.

"Now! Now!" she whispered, and pushing back the door she stepped lightly into the car. Everitt followed her.

"This is incredible!" he whispered. "If he finds us——"

"He won't find us, *mon pauvre ami*," she said calmly. "You can't seem to realize that!"

"But don't talk so loud!"

"Talk!" she repeated scornfully. "We could sing!"

And when the man took his seat again, after replacing the matches and closing the door, she actually sang the words of the music-hall song he whistled.

They flew along quickly. Everitt took out his watch, and it was four o'clock.

"We'll be home while it's light," he thought in a moment of forgetfulness; "and then—and then——"

His breath was cut as if by a knife. What was "then" to him? What did people do, like this? What was he supposed to do? How long would it last? He groaned and dug his nails into his palms. His forehead was damp again, and he wiped it impatiently. To sit there comfortably, bowling along towards Paris in a well-appointed motor, behind a correct chauffeur, with a well-dressed, good-looking woman beside him—and then to know that it was all a farce!

"What's the sense of it? Where's the good of it?" he tortured himself. "If I'm dead, for God's sake let me die and get it over! This is simply idiotic!"

Whether he had groaned aloud or whether she knew his thoughts, he could not tell, but she answered him quietly, her warm hand always in his—for it seemed their one hold on reality, their one assurance among all these hopeless uncertainties, thus to grasp each other.

"I don't suppose we can choose, you know. If this is the way it is, this is the way it is—isn't it? At least, one isn't alone. I went to school somewhere about here, I think. It was the loveliest old convent. There was a wonderful vegetable garden, and a fountain with a big copper pot on a chain. Such a darling old dog, always asleep in the sun there; his name was Amidor. They used to make the most heavenly *compote* of cherries, and we had it on fresh bread with unsalted butter. I used to eat it, and always look at the marigolds, because I thought it tasted better that way! Sœur Ambroisine was the head of the kitchen. Did you ever see one of those dark, French

kitchens with the copper things shining, and the oak all black and polished? We had soup for breakfast, and a rich South American—from Brazil, she was—used to give me all her onions, and I gave her my carrots. I never liked carrots. But Sœur Marie-Josephine found us out and wouldn't let us; she said *le bon Dieu* didn't like to have people choose like that. He preferred us to take the soup as He sent it! 'In that case,' I said, 'one should eat the vegetables raw.' I had no butter for three days."

The stream of her voice, low and pleasant, with sudden drops into a grave contralto, flowed about his restless burning thoughts and cooled and comforted them.

Soon she was talking about music, which he loved, and a concert, when she had heard, a night or two ago, his favourite César Franck sonata.

"And a really good violinist—I mean, in the French sense—correct and well trained, you know. I sometimes wonder what they'd do, these people, if they heard a real orchestra, with a great conductor and beautiful instruments."

"They'd faint, probably," he answered satirically; "or think it was a little uncivilized, perhaps."

"That, I think. Did you ever hear real Tziganes play? Not what we have in our restaurants at home—they're mostly Italians—but real ones? I heard one play that sonata once."

She hummed the air, and he corrected her jealously. For the rest of the drive they forgot—and were happy.

At the door of a garage in the heart of Paris the man stopped, opened the door of the car, and called for someone to bring him a fresh bulb for the inside light. They got out and drifted along the Grand Boulevard, hand in hand, jostled by everyone, felt by none. The lights and sounds and movements exhilarated Everitt and took him out of himself; he strode on, talking and laughing, even, in a kind of desperate distraction. But she grew steadily quieter, gripped his hand nervously at the dangerous crossings, shrank against him, and even dragged her pace.

"I—I can't walk quite so fast," she said a little breathlessly. "My—my feet feel heavy and—and farther away, somehow. I—I——"

"What's the matter?" he asked anxiously, stopping and staring at her. "You mustn't—I mean, is anything really—— Oh, please be careful!"

"That's just it," she answered with a faint little pathetic smile. "I thought I ought to tell you. Of course one notices everything. I may be just tired, but I feel different. It's difficult to explain, but you know, in dreams, when you lift your feet and put them down, and try so hard, but you don't get anywhere? Do you know at all what I mean?"

"I always know what you mean," he answered brusquely. "Come—come in here. Sit down, for heaven's sake! You're only tired."

He had no self-consciousness now, no terror of the crowds that filled the hall, where dancing was in full swing. He led her to an empty table, and watched her sink with relief into a chair. A worried look about her eyes, a slight droop of the mouth, had quite changed the calm, slightly amused expression that he now realized was characteristic of her.

The funny French couples trotted solidly past them.

"And they think that is a tango!" she said, and laughed. "With the *vrai jazz américain!* They haven't the least idea of syncopation; they think 'jazz' means a saxophone and a drum! How stupidly those darkies are playing!"

"They're probably half drunk," he answered carelessly, watching her closely. "Here, don't get up! Where are you going?"

"I'd like to see if I can't hypnotize them into something real," she said; and he saw with delight that a

sort of girlish daring had worked in her, a spirit of experiment that took, for the time being, that tired worried look out of her eyes.

"Come on," he said, "let's try!"

Leading him by the hand, like a child in some just-invented game, she threaded her way among the absorbed dancers, and stepped close to the saxophone player, who, with half-closed eyes, breathed out now and then a few bell-like notes, tapping carelessly with his feet.

"Come," she said persuasively, touching his arm, "that's not the way—you know it! You can't fool us, you know. Play it right, for once! We're not French!"

The negro opened his eyes slowly, moved his arm, and stared at her. A strange bluish pallor spread over his dark face, his eyeballs rolled back in his head.

"Take it away! Take it away!" he cried, and fell back in his chair, pushing over the men behind him.

"What's come? What's come, Henry?" they babbled, and only the pianist pounded on, his back to them.

"Le' me out! le' me out!" he screamed; and four of them with shaking backward glances tumbled out after him, the dancers crowding angrily to the platform, a confused clatter of exasperated French raining like shrapnel over the crowd.

"What's the matter with them?" she asked, amazed, staring at the mêlée. "Is he crazy?"

"Ah, come on," growled a tall American, pulling the girl with him out of the crowd. "When these Frenchies get excited they're the limit!"

"But, listen; what happened?" the girl asked, dragging at his arm. "What struck him that way?"

"Oh, he's just a crazy nigger," the man answered disgustedly. "Didn't you hear him? He said he liked the French girls all right, but he wasn't going to stand for no French ghosts! I'll bet they're running now! Come on to Montmartre, Bess; it's no good here."

Everitt felt his heart pound, the veins beat in his ears.

"Come out," he said roughly. "Come out—now! It means nothing—it didn't mean——"

She slipped her hand under his arm.

"Hurry," she murmured; "hurry, please!"

They pushed by the proprietor, who was making an impassioned appeal for order, and promising another band immediately.

Once in the fresh air they walked in silence. Neither could speak. After a few minutes her pace began to lag, and dreading the look he might catch on her face he stopped in front of a lighted door.

"Here," he said, "come in here. Don't be afraid; there won't be any jazz bands here"

In the lobby of the quiet, correct hotel there were few loiterers; it was just too early for dinner and much too late for tea. They climbed a few tiled steps and came into the velvet lounge, where only a couple and a few men, scattered among the big chairs, still lingered. He led her to a large divan and established her, protesting, on it, utterly careless of the occupants of the room.

"Please be still," he begged, "and try not to think of it! If I could only bring you something."

"I don't think I want anything," she said thoughtfully. "I meant to speak about that. You see, I drink a lot of water—ordinarily—but I don't feel thirsty at all. But we certainly can feel tired, can't we? Are you hungry?"

He shook his head.

"And I hadn't had any lunch, either. I thought of that too. Do you feel better now?"

"Much better," she said gratefully. "It's only walking I seem to be so clumsy at. Isn't it pleasant and quiet here?"

"Yes. It's a good hotel. I've often stayed here. And they play really good music after dinner. I've sat here and smoked and listened to it often."

"Were you much in Paris?" she asked.

"I came first when I finished at Oxford," he said. "My uncle sent me, as a reward for having got through without being sent down, I suppose. I came with three other fellows, and we had a glorious time!"

"What did you do?"

"Well," he answered, "with a few reservations I'll tell you. First, we went to the Opéra——"

He talked on easily, delighted at her interest and at the absence of that strained. frightened look he had learned to dread. Unconsciously he lowered his voice, and they murmured to each other in a profound intimacy. She no longer held to his hand, but he noticed that when anyone moved in their direction or whenever a new face appeared in the door she reached out for him, and he caught her hand and pressed it.

She asked few questions; he rambled on among his young man's memories, back to his boyhood, came again to later years. Odd little moments he had supposed lost for ever—a flaming sunset on the Jungfrau, an unforgettable hour of Paderewski, the instant fear of death in an accident at sea, his mother's face when she gave him cherries one hot noon and he piled them in a tiny checked pinafore, the first nightingales he heard in Italy—they bubbled up from the very well of his heart, it seemed, and she listened and smiled and understood.

"And when were you happiest?" she asked.

The dining-room was full now, the orchestra was playing Pagliacci; they were alone in the lounge.

"Why, now, I think," he answered instantly; "now—at forty-one! It's odd, isn't it? One thinks that you th——"

"Now?" she asked gently. "Now?"

He stared at her and blinked. Again he was lost in her eyes: again the room swayed slightly and the heavy velvet curtains began to push inward, bellying like sails; the couch rocked, where she lay, like a boat at sea.

"Oh! Oh!" he muttered. "What is this? What is this? What are you doing?"

"I am doing nothing," she said gravely; "it is you who are pushing me, drawing me. Look away!"

With a tremendous effort he tore his eyes away, and the music swelled again; he realized that everything had been silent before.

"Was that always playing?" he asked dully, and she shook her head.

"I don't know. I heard the water. How long do you suppose it will last? Why don't we see—the others? We aren't the only ones, surely?"

"I've been thinking that so long—I didn't dare tell you! I can't imagine why. In this big place there must be someone every minute, nearly."

"But you will stay with me?" she urged eagerly, sitting now on the divan, where he crouched beside her, so that he rose and sat by her. "You will be here, whatever happens?"

"I'll be here, whatever happens," he said, and took her hand. "I swear I'll keep where you are as long as it's humanly possible, my dear. It'll take a fight to get me away."

"Oh, don't! How do we know? This—this can't last. If it could be like this——"

"Would you wish it to be?"

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes!"

The orchestra softened and thrummed, waiting.

"Träume," she whispered. "How lovely!"

Suddenly, in the middle of the melting, trembling notes, she spoke.

"Are you religious?" she asked. "What do you believe?"

"I don't know," he answered. "I'm not at all religious, though—are you?"

"No."

"I've been up to the average," he

went on slowly. "Lord knows it's not much! But I never cheated, nor went back on anybody, and I don't lie—unless I have to! Oh, I mean, not that sort of lie!"

"I know. It's like that with me, too. So we're alike."

"Lord, no, we're not! Don't get that idea—not for a minute, my dear! Men—men——"

"Oh, I suppose so," she said wearily. "I suppose so. Do you think that will make a difference?"

"I don't know," he said briefly.

They sat in a long silence.

"Do you know," she said suddenly, "even if I wanted to get up I couldn't? Not alone, anyway. My feet are too heavy." He stared at her, horrified, but her face was calm. "It's no good fighting it," she said. "Only, stay here, will you?"

He shut his lips till the teeth cut them.

"I'll stay," he said.

A middle-aged maid, leading a wire-haired terrier, came through the lounge and walked down to them. The dog checked suddenly, stared at Everitt, drew back on his haunches, and uttered a wild groaning howl. The hair stood stiff on his small, stocky body; his jaws opened.

"*Tais-toi, tais-toi!*" the maid cried, but he howled again and stiffened.

She dragged at him, but he dug his nails into the velvet and raised again that melancholy, searching cry. Everitt threatened him wildly, but he did not move.

"One would say," said the maid angrily, in rapid French, "that the poor beast scented the death! And, why not? His mistress is sickly enough. Come on, thou!"

Two footmen rushed out and seized the dog, scolding.

"Wilt thou drive every accursed American from the hotel with thy imbecile brute? Up! Up!" they stormed, and the stronger of them seized the rigid animal and hurried out with it, the woman running angrily after, holding the leash. The maître d'hôtel dashed into the lounge, cursing; someone called from behind the desk:

"Command that the orchestra play immediately the jazz *américain*—fools! Pigs!"

Everitt leaned over her; she was ashy white.

"Water! Water!" he whispered. "It helped you before! I'll be back in a second!"

She met his eyes, but this time with no danger in her own. Her look was so deep, so speaking, that with a sobbing word caught in his throat he leaned over her and kissed her desperately, closely.

"Oh, stay! Stay!" he whispered against her mouth. "Try to stay!"

He felt her lips grow cold under his, and muttering and cursing he tore himself away and rushed to a carafe that stood on a little table halfway across the room. He seized the bottle, but to his horror, though his hand closed around it, it remained on the table. It was like taking hold of a carafe in a mirror.

"And yet I brought her water in my cap!" He wondered stupidly. "I slopped it all over her!"

Turning, he hurried back. The divan was empty. With a grunt of rage he passed his hand over it; it was still warm, where she had been sitting.

"She was frightened—she ran out!" he muttered, and dashed after her, out of the door, but he knew he should not see her. She had gone. He was utterly and entirely alone.

Cursing, praying, calling her, he tore through the streets, alone in the crowded boulevards, jostling unconscious pedestrians, pushing carelessly against the screaming motors. And as he dashed along he became aware that his progress was growing more difficult, his feet moved more slowly. He seemed to lift them up as out of wet sand, and each motion required a distinct effort of the will.

"Aha!" he muttered. "That's what she meant, then! That's it, is it? We'll see, we'll see! They

shan't get me that way—I'll fool them!"

And even in that minute something in him marvelled.

"It's 'them' is it—not 'he'? Do we always go back to that? Were the old peoples right, after all?"

Furiously, determinedly, fighting for each long clumsy stride, he pushed his way to what he wanted.

"That bridge with the gold statues—what do they call it?" he muttered. "Ah, there it is!"

He shouldered rudely into a priest, unconsciously stepping in his way.

"A lot you know about it!" he cried bitterly. "You can't even see me."

For the thin lips moved constantly, the mild pale eyes gazed through his blankly.

"Bah!" he cried, and seizing the stone balustrade he dragged himself painfully to the top; he could hardly pull his feet after him.

"Now we'll see what happens!" he muttered "Oh, why did you leave me? Why did you go first?"

The lights rippled over the water; the Seine flowed full and quiet below him; he raised his hands and jumped, and something in his brain blew out as a candle flame blows out in the wind. He knew nothing.

Later—it might have been years or seconds—he felt great burning pain; an anguish of revolt against unbearable nausea; a smothered oblivion.

This trinity of misery repeated itself indefinitely; there was no escape from it, no relief after it.

"It's not dying, then, that's hard; it's what comes after!" he thought. "Why can't it be simpler—quicker? We aren't worth all this."

He opened his eyes surprisingly, and met two bright brown eyes that smiled into his.

"That's better, Mr. Everitt!" said somebody. "Can you take this, please? That's fine!"

Something cool slipped into his mouth; he swallowed.

"You see me, then? You know who I am?"

"Why, of course, Mr. Everitt. Have you much pain? I'm the nurse. You are in the hospital. How does your head feel?"

"Then I didn't die?"

"No, indeed; you were in an accident, you know."

"Was Elsie——"

"Oh, no, Mr. Everitt; she was better off than you, really. She broke her leg; it's in a cast now, but she'll soon be out of that."

"When did I——"

"It was three weeks ago, Mr. Everitt. Mrs. George Everitt has sent every day to find out about you. Mr. Everitt will probably look in this afternoon. Perhaps you'll take a little nap now?"

The details interested him very little. When in the early days of his rapid recovery he elicited from the nurse the confessed amazement and incredulity of the doctors at the resuscitation, after eight hours, of a man officially pronounced dead, he became almost disappointingly silent. The application of electricity, at the instance of an interested specialist; the operation, extraordinarily slight, which removed the splinter of bone pressing on the brain; the painful flutterings and vacillations with which the mysterious force that we call life exhibited itself in a body that seemed unwilling to be possessed by it—all this received his merely tolerant attention.

"You see, I was dead," he said quietly.

And when the nurse shrugged and answered, "Evidently you weren't, Mr. Everitt, for here you are!" he only smiled obstinately and looked at her oddly.

From the day he sat up he pored over the newspapers of that date since when his life could never go on in the same careless empty way; but there was no smallest mention of the event he searched for. As soon as he could get out he began a systematic round of the hospitals,

scoured the country for miles around the cross-roads where he had met her, made his way into a dozen farmhouses and villas, but with no success.

"And I don't even know her name!" he groaned. "Nor where she came from!"

Paris grew hot, his sister-in-law left, surprised at his obstinacy, but anxious, as they all were, to humour him, and relieved that he spent so much of his time in the open air at least, though regretting that what they described to one another as a morbid interest kept him haunting the scene of his accident.

Alternately possessed by hope and despair, he clung to the idea that the same strange fate had mastered both of them; that she, of all the toll of that day's dead, had not died, and that they had wandered through that mysterious borderland together.

And deep in the bottom of his heart something tolled like a bell, though he tried to shut his ears to it: "She doesn't know! She isn't here to know! She would tell me if she could—but she can't!"

He would go to sleep at night hugging the thought. "But perhaps she has forgotten. Perhaps it wasn't like what it was with me! Perhaps she doesn't know!"

And in the morning he would wake to the tolling of that cruel little bell. "She isn't here to know!"

His sister settled in England, he moved to the hotel where he had taken her, and sat, a lonely figure, every night, on the great divan where she had lain. Once, when the orchestra played Pagliacci, a quick hot smarting closed his eyes suddenly, and he clenched his hands, hearing her voice:

"Were you much in Paris?"

He knew, then, that he was thinking of her as we think of the dead, and groaned aloud.

"I wish I had gone, too!" he muttered.

He spent the next days in hunting out the convent near Chartres, where she had gone to school, and found it at last, no longer under the sisters, but kept by an angular Englishwoman for the benefit of English girls. Nothing had altered, thanks to the immutable French fashions, and the dark old kitchen where Sœur Ambroisine had ruled still glowed with orange coppers, the marigolds flamed in the court. Even an old tawny sheep dog dozed near the well; perhaps the lineal descendant of Amidor.

It pleased him enormously, this pilgrimage, and he promised himself a return. If only she had told him more of her past, so that he could have relived it!

He dressed for dinner and slipped into his pocket the ticket for a César Franck concert that night; an eminent violinist was playing the Sonata, and he knew in advance the painful sweetness in store for him, and that he would live over again that hour and a half in the close dimness of the motor, with her hand in his.

"I know that men have been this way before," he told himself, "but they hadn't my excuse, they hadn't my excuse!"

He took his seat at his accustomed table in the corner and, having ordered his dinner, looked carefully around the room. This had become automatic with him, ever since he came to the hotel. He had told himself then that if she were alive, and in Paris, and remembered, she would come there.

And in the opposite corner, suddenly, there she was. Lovelier than he had remembered, perhaps because her low-cut evening dress framed white shoulders he had never seen; and paler, which threw out the reddish lights in her hair; she seemed more slender in her black velvet than she had appeared in the tan silk coat. His heart stopped a beat, then pounded heavily, and he half-turned in his chair and opened a newspaper.

She sat between an elderly woman and a good-looking, square-chinned

man who watched her with obvious interest; she herself looked at nobody, but studied the menu.

Everitt called the maître d'hôtel and took out a bank-note.

"Who is the young lady in the corner, Ernest, in black?" he inquired, blessing the Paris that found all such queries natural and worthy. The man departed, and soon returned.

"It is Miss Sylvia Reetch, monsieur. Mademoiselle her aunt and Mr. Georges MacAlistairre accompany her. They arrived this morning only. Mademoiselle and the aunt occupy Suite B, *au quatrième*. Monsieur does not rest in the hotel. Thank you very much, monsieur."

"Sylvia Ritch," he repeated softly.

He ate mechanically and wondered at the flatness of the wine, only to find at the end of the meal that he had been drinking mineral water. When her party rose he rose with them, and followed discreetly to the lounge, where they drank their coffee. He took a table behind where she sat, to hear her voice; it fell a little more to the contralto, he decided. She spoke little.

"But I hate to leave you, Sylvie," said her aunt doubtfully. "It seems so horrid to let you go off to that stupid concert alone. Let me go to the theatre by myself, and let George take you!"

"Please, aunty," she said, very low, "I have told you that I prefer to go alone. George doesn't care for César Franck."

"But I'd love to go with you," said the man wistfully; "or I could take Miss Ritch and come back for you."

"I want to go alone," she said wearily. "Can't you understand? I shall be all right. It's because I want to go alone!"

Everitt could have touched her with his hand.

"Then I suppose we had better be starting," said Mr. MacAllister. "You don't leave till nine, Sylvia?"

"At nine," she said. "I'll sit here awhile."

They rose and left her, and she folded her hands in her lap and closed her eyes.

The orchestra, after a soft thrumming, began to play Wagner's Träume; he stared at her, too weak to move or speak.

From under her closed eyelids slow tears began to roll; she wiped them away, but they rose and rose, and brimmed till with a despairing little gesture she left her seat and hurried towards the lift.

"If they have a suite," he thought, "they have a sitting-room," and taking a card from his pocket he wrote on it: "Why did you wait so long? You can't have forgotten. I've been waiting here for you. May I see you?"

It seemed hardly a moment before the page came back.

"Will monsieur mount?" he said. "Madame attends him."

She stood in the gay little room, black and pale and slender against the flowers and curtains.

"You? You?" she whispered. And then, holding his hands, her eyes wide: "But you—the paper said—I thought——"

"Where were you?" he said, trembling. "Why did you make me think—— Oh, wherever were you?"

"I was in England," she murmured, her eyes lost in his. "They took me there. I—I was supposed to have died, you know. I couldn't stay any longer. Oh, why didn't you let me know? It was cruel!"

"I didn't know your name," he said, staring at the lovely rose that flooded her cheeks, the tiny powdered freckles on her chin, the deep light in her grey eyes. "My dear, I didn't know your name! I could only stay here. I knew, if you were alive, you would come."

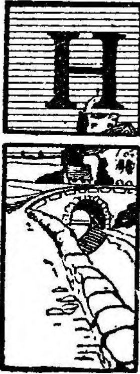
"Oh, I am alive!" she cried softly. "I am alive, my dear! And I came—I came!"

JOSEPHINE DASKAM BACON.

Mammon Misjudges

By William Dudley Pelley

" Clear as the tone of a bell at vespers, soft at first, growing in strength as the need brought confidence, rising higher and finer and surer as the wind rose also, throwing challenge supreme to the night and disaster—in the teeth of the cold and the tempest *came the voice of one singing!*"



HE emerged from an inconspicuous hotel in a side street and headed toward Broadway. At a cursory glance he was a mediocre fellow in his middle thirties. He wore a plain black suit under a raglan overcoat common to ten thousand young men in New York, and a soft beaver hat pulled down well over his eyes.

The keen wind of that autumn morning might have been responsible for that velour being pulled down so tightly. Yet the keen wind could have nothing to do with the distress in those eyes.

On the register of the inconspicuous hotel he had signed himself a month before: John C. Williams, Portland, Oregon. But he was not John C. Williams of Portland, Oregon. He had never been in Oregon in his life; never even west of the Mississippi. His real name was John W. Barkling and he came from Portland, Ohio.

Whatever the reason for this *alias* or his presence in modern New York City, and whether or not either had anything to contribute to the misery of his eyes, John Barkling's pose of Important Business affected around the corridors of the hotel gradually left him as he approached Broadway. His firm, energetic stride became an aimless stroll. Then it lapsed into a semi-shamble. Finally, stepping aside out of foot traffic, he halted dejectedly on a corner.

New York was busy with the roar of vast, rumbling enterprise all about him—yet apparently John W. Barkling, *alias* Williams, had no business. The ten o'clock sunshine flooded from a sharp indigo sky high above the swirling smoke of towering buildings—yet it did not shine for him; it only irritated. Thousands of men and women criss-crossed all about him, intense on the activities which earned them food, shelter, clothing, amusements; for John Barkling at the moment there was no chance for such activity. Even if he knew where to go for work it is doubtful if he would have been able to hold his place. Concentration would have been impossible. Beside, what sort of position could he ever secure without references or credentials?

The man raised his weary eyes and glanced around. Where should he go? What should he do? He had visited all of the chief points of interest during his first week in the city; there could be small distraction in going the rounds of them again. And he wanted distraction. He wanted it terribly. He ambled down another block, staring with unseeing eyes at windows.

New York was a delusion, save for the financial district. He would take a surface car down there. Somehow he always found a grim fascination in crawling nearer and nearer in a street trolley down through the wholesale districts into the brick-and-mortar canyons of American high finance. Every block traversed was a new thrill of some kind and—— Yes, he would take a surface car to the financial district.

By William Dudley Pelley

Whereupon John W. Barkling, late of Portland, Ohio, did take a surface car for the financial district. But all unseen, someone boarded that battered, low-slung, side-door trolley with him. The party's name was also John and his years were beyond all computation. John J. Coincidence stepped up into the car, and as John Barkling's nickel rattled down into the conductor's glass box, the side doors crashed shut behind the two of them. Opinions often differ as to whether truth is stranger than fiction—especially certain modern fiction. But those whose wanderings to and fro on the earth have made them wise as serpents and harmless as doves know that New York, in the last analysis, is not at all Babylon. New York is a great, overgrown country village where all the world rubs shoulders between the post office and the opera house. So one is far more liable to encounter one's chief creditor going through Union Square or along Forty-second Street than along some country road out where the woodbine eternally twineth. At any rate, this thing *happened* to John Barkling:

He beheld one empty seat up toward the front of the car. He would have to ride backward for a time until better seats were vacated, but that did not matter. He negotiated the aisle and sank down with his knees almost touching those of the corpulent individual in the seat facing him. The corpulent individual was engrossed in a newspaper, and neither gave the other special attention. Barkling parted his raglan, drew his own morning paper from his pocket and affected to read, meanwhile watching his chance for a window seat where he could be faced in the same direction the car was travelling.

He had finished the front page and was opening to the second when the stout passenger opposite dropped his paper with a start, glanced around wildly, then leaned across his neighbour's lap and peered with perturbation through the window to apprise himself of the locality. *In that instant John Barkling's heart stopped with a strangle, his stomach turned over, his blood congealed and paralysis smote him flaccid!*

The passenger opposite was Herb Lougee, plain-clothes man in the Portland, O., Department of Police.

Barkling managed to lift his paper before Lougee saw his face. But the upper corners of the sheet trembled so violently they almost resulted in noise. He tried to draw his breath and discovered that his lungs were missing. It was the most ghastly fright he had suffered in all his life, birthed and ulcerated by countless hours of imagining an encounter with Lougee exactly as had happened. Hallucination? As well talk of hallucination when beholding one's reflection in a mirror. Could he mistake any line in the detective's features which he knew so well from friendly association before Barkling fled Ohio?—his stolid brow and reddish nose, the angle of the foggy glasses, the low collar which the patent tie never fitted neatly, the vest smudged with cigar-ash. Thirty inches from him sat Herb Lougee without the fraction of a hair's breadth for doubt, and his question to the boy between him and the window only confirmed the sickening deadliness of his presence likewise in New York.

"You don't happen to know if the Bastile Hotel is anywhere 'round in this neighbourhood, do you?" he asked. "A policeman told me it was a few steps off one o' these side streets."

The boy shrugged his sharp shoulders impersonally. Lougee turned and leaned over the aisle to inspect the buildings on the east side of the street while sweat was forced out on Barkling's forehead in thought that in the next breath the detective would address a similar query to himself. But Lougee did not bother the newspaper reader

whose knees were nearly interlocked with his own. He concluded he had reached a neighbourhood where further search had best be conducted afoot. He arose, pressed the "Stop" button and left the car, poking away his glasses and folding his paper as he waited for the patent doors to open and release him.

The moment that the sidewalk crowd swallowed him, Barkling "came up for air" like a swimmer who has been obliged to hold his head under water until it was near to bursting.

Why was Herb Lougee in New York, hunting obscure hotels, excepting to apprehend him? That John J. Coincidence had caused him to board this particular trolley and had now alighted with the officer was something for Barkling to marvel upon later. The point was, Herb Lougee *was* in New York and on hunt for one John Barkling, late of Portland, Ohio, and sooner or later must arrive at the inconspicuous hotel farther uptown. And then, as the distressed one's physical self returned to something approximating normal, down upon him came *panic*, stark, dazing, hideous panic! Herb had somehow trailed him to New York, else the officer would not be here. There remained a solitary alternative, as humanely natural as self-preservation: John J. Coincidence had shown himself a kindly old gentleman and connived at a warning—Barkling must put space between himself and the Ohio plain-clothes man as abruptly as human ingenuity would permit.

Out of the car staggered Barkling and down a subway rabbit-hole. Mercifully a train drew in at once and Barkling tumbled in. The handful of blocks were covered in a twinkling and the swift service somewhat ameliorated the fugitive's overpowering fright. He tried to pull himself together as he approached the hotel desk.

"Please make out my bill," he requested, "and have it ready in ten minutes; I've got to catch the next train for Philadelphia." He intercepted the head of the messengers. "Send a boy up to my room—six-thirty-four—at once; I want some help packing my things and getting a taxi. I'm called away suddenly."

The bill was ready in three minutes and not more than ten minutes later Barkling stepped from the elevator with two bulky suitcases. The boy went outside to hail a cab.

"Pennsylvania station!" the boy told the chauffeur when the door had slammed and the engine accelerated.

"No, no!" cried Barkling. "The Fifth Avenue Trust Company. I've got to go to the bank first. I've got to get my money!"

The taxi shot out into the traffic.

"I'd almost think there was a cop after that bird," observed the messenger as he passed back through the revolving doors.

At the bank Barkling closed out his account; he had banked all his funds on coming to the city with the idea that it might later give him prestige if he stumbled upon an opportunity to enter a business. That was all past now. In spite of all the twistings and turnings over the eastern United States which the fugitive had taken since fleeing Portland, Ohio, Lougee had trailed him unerringly and was now running down the hotels, probably with a photograph against which the *alias* was futile. The need of the moment was to get a long lead on Lougee, a lead which would be cold and scentless by the time the detective's hotel search had been rewarded.

"Grand Central!" the distraught one cried to his taxi man, emerging from the bank. "And work fast, please! I got to catch a train with hardly time to buy a ticket!"

But he did buy a ticket. At a wicket where the least number of prospective travellers were telescoped, he halted and bade the Ethiopian red-cap do likewise with

his valises. While a finicky and verbose woman procured the long ticket for a complicated journey Barkling cast febrile glances at all who came near him. When a policeman sauntered past, eyeing the lines, the fleeing man's heart again began missing cylinders. But the woman at length gathered up her change and departed.

"Can you sell me a through-ticket for Halifax, Nova Scotia?" the Ohioan demanded of the clerk. He tried to keep his voice low and those behind from overhearing. "By way of Boston," he added as an afterthought.

It consumed a nerve-racking time to get the long green strip, write the destination, figure out tariff and war-tax and arrange the nights' sleeping accommodations out of Boston. However, it was over at last and a train for Massachusetts was leaving in seventeen minutes.

Barkling got through the gate without challenge. Nervously exhausted, he shrank as inconspicuously as possible into a rear seat of the day smoker.

So much for outwitting Herb Lougee—up to the moment. Now if Herb wanted a chase, he could have it. Europe, Asia, Africa—if necessary, what did it matter? The immediate thing was to get out of the United States. The train had left the terminal tunnels behind and was almost into Bridgeport before necessity for a passport to reach Europe, Asia, or Africa dawned upon him. Of course, the obtaining of a passport was out of the question.

Around three o'clock the massive locomotive gave tired coughs under the vast train-shed of the South station. Barkling alighted, hat well over his eyes, coat collar upturned. He carried his own suitcases. In the toilet of the men's room he tore up the rest of his ticket and disposed of the pieces. The matter of a passport had altered his plans completely.

Unconsciously Barkling was not fleeing from Lougee half so much as from his own imagination. He only wanted as remote and inaccessible a spot for his destination as he could find in any part of the world, that could be reached without a passport. He had always been rather contemptuous of Herb's abilities as a detective. But back of the corpulent, tobacco-stained, slow-moving Herb was that vast, ominous, unsleeping, indefatigable thing known as The Law. There must be some spot where The Law stood checkmate. Barkling must locate that place and locate it quickly. Thank Goodness he had some money left. He checked his bags in the parcel-room and strolled down Atlantic Avenue for thought and exercise.

It was a quarter after four o'clock when he returned to the station. He elbowed his way through the crowd about the parcel window, got his bags in a hurry through sheer nerve of which he was not conscious, and banged out into the human congestion of Dewey Square. A moment later the home-going commuters from the shoe and wholesale leather district engulfed him. He had it; the time-table rack of a near-by hotel had supplied the folder which gave him his inspiration.

Dark, stolid, phlegmatic, the peaks of the Three Topsails were dimly visible on the north, behind them a mammoth backdrop of ominous heavens where ever at twilight a great, lone bird hung motionless, high in solitude. Then came night like the cloud from a dead volcano and wind that howled, that swept caribou flat and lowland to thicken the ice on Grand Lake and Humber.

Three hundred and sixty miles covered, five hundred and forty-eight yet to go. The frail, wooden, narrow-gauge train rocked onward—cheerlessly, monotonously. Ceiling lamps burned too dimly for reading. To sleep was impossible; the coaches caromed from rail to rail and the seats were small, iron-armed, torturous.

The fussy, high-backed engine

hauled but two coaches on that tiresome journey from St. John's, Newfoundland, westward to Port-Aux-Basques on the opposite side of the island where the steamer left twice a week for Cape Breton. The first was a combination baggage-car-and-smoker; the second was an antiquated day-coach. There had been a dining-car-and-sleeper when the train began that three-day journey, but a broken truss near Bishops on the second morning of the trip had caused its elimination for repairs. The Port-Aux-Basques passengers had the only alternative of the day-coach, for the train must go through with the Royal mail.

There were eight of these passengers. On the right-hand side the car, up forward, a typical back-country Newfoundlander—with an oversized derby nearly resting on his huge ears, a mat of brown beard hiding his shirt-front like a massive chest protector and a misfit suit in a million wrinkles—rode beside a dusky, stoical, half-breed woman to some little hamlet on the western coast. The man spent most of his time twisted in his seat, staring at his fellow-passengers.

Two angular, middle-aged women who might have been school-teachers were making that trip; a well-dressed but frail old man with mutton-chop whiskers and a hacking cough who resembled a long-retired banker; an elderly gentleman of remarkably serene countenance in the dress of a clergyman, and a fine-figured, black-eyed girl wearing a Salvation Army bonnet. Lastly, a fellow in his middle thirties clad in a black suit and raglan overcoat with soft hat always pulled down as though to hide his eyes, rode near the rear door and discouraged all attempts to draw him into conversation.

Plainly this fellow came from "the States," yet despite repeated endeavour at acquaintance, by the minister, his manner remained taciturn. For hours at a time he brooded darkly with hand across his mouth, right elbow resting on the window-sill and anguished eyes fixed on the distance. Those eyes disturbed the clergyman. A rather mediocre young man travelling for business perhaps, had been his first careless appraisal. Then he had fallen to studying Barkling when the latter was unaware of the scrutiny. The more the minister studied, the more he realized that the fellow across the aisle was anything but mediocre. The former suddenly longed to speak to the young man freely, to draw him out, to ease away that unhappiness so marked upon his countenance. Each attempt, however, had proved distressing. Eliminating the harassed eyes, Barkling had a strong face, a powerful face. No, he was not mediocre, and the clergyman was puzzled.

It was eight-thirty of that second day of tedious riding that the first snow started. It seemed to hit the island railroad with a burst. The wind arose, a wind that gradually developed into a hard, wild-beast yowl as the hours of darkness deepened.

"By George! it's snowing!" the minister declared as the trainman passed through to the rear platform after leaving Quarry—hat and shoulders glistening white.

Barkling only nodded grumpily and went into the smoker.

He would have enjoyed a longer respite in St. John's, for Newfoundland had proved a pleasing discovery—it would have been a capital place to rest, permanently, only for one thing. Imagination!

They had told him that St. John's was often travel-bound in the stern mid-winter. If Lougee succeeded in tracing him and word came by cable or wireless to apprehend and arrest him, Barkling experienced the sensation of being caught like a rat in a trap. Not that! Better to move westward before deep winter blocked the trains, to Cape Breton, off through Canada, perhaps down through America again to southern

By William Dudley Pelley

California!—and so he was on this rocking little two-car train this night, the wheels shrieking on the rails above the roar of the sudden wind like the wail of the Banshee. That wind was steadily rising—growing bolder, fiercer. Flakes were hard and frozen at nine-thirty; they sissed against the northern windows like deadly steel needles.

Behind St. John's, Barkling had found rolling farmlands cropped for winter, reaching away to far forests of spruce, as black in the distance as the tents of goblins. Scraggly fishing hamlets clung to high cliffs above Conception Bay and Trinity. Wide views of a steel-grey ocean were disclosed, flung to the mammoth Arctic, where the ice came down in immense bergs, and ships were but bluish flecks against the Infinite; there were scores of such pictures as the train had trembled its way over high bridges and frail pilings where bays and "tickles" narrowed to rivulets and passengers looked down dizzily on breakers white below or the decks of small, two-masted, brown-sailed "gashers" back from the summer's work around Labrador. Then the cold sea vanished and the coastal mountains lowered. The world reached away in moorland. Caribou roamed here and fat salmon lay snug in the bottom of the rivers. Vastness, awfulness, silence, distance; bear hills, wolf ranges, gull marshes, deer bottoms; ragged little settlements straddled across the narrow railroad where the twice-a-week train was a Spectacle; solitary huts on lonely skylines where half-wild people bred half-wild families and the hills and the clouds ruled supreme—it would have been the greatest pleasure-jaunt of his life for Barkling but for the gnawing at his soul within. Pleasure-jaunt indeed! Yet who had reckoned on a blizzard?

Into the whistling night, hourly growing terrible with risk, the wheels shrieked on. Nine-thirty, ten o'clock, eleven! Pilings creaked as the weight of the little train passed over brooks, defiles and water courses. Down from the Topsails, from Sykes, Seemore, a score of lesser summits, across the moors and over the swamps, to waste itself and die out only on Red Indian Lake or Bay of Fundy—a storm of white terror was coming, a storm that might keep on coming for days without ceasing, that was slowing the train already and blanching a train-crew's faces.

"'Taint the time o' year for no blow like this, Jawn," contended the anxious conductor to his brakeman-and-baggageman in the smoker. "It's ugly, Jawn. I don't like the sound of it."

"Hugley hand growin' huglier!" was the consolation of Jawn, the Englishman. "Hi honly 'opes, Hi does, that we gets through to 'Owley."

"Let's see, it was seven year ago that Squeers and his crew was caught, warn't it?"

"Seven years, 'Erbert, and froze solid!"

"Well, here's hopin' we don't get froze solid."

"We won't hiff we gets through to 'Owley. But Hime a doubtin' sort o' cove at times, 'Erbert, specially with the wind ablowin' sommat to the likes o' *that!* It'll tip us over, 'Erbert! Has sure as shootin', hit'll tip us over!"

Perhaps it was the strength of the wind, perhaps it was the increasing chill of the car, perhaps it was the loneliness of the night and inability to sleep. Whatever it was, Barkling felt a sudden overwhelming hunger for human companionship. When the clergyman stopped his nervous pacing of the aisle the next time and spoke to him, his reply was not a surly grunt.

"Early for such a storm as this seems to be, isn't it?" Barkling asked huskily. "Are you going through to Port-Aux-Basques?" And the American pushed over the seat-back before him invitingly.

"I'm going through to Smoky Tickle." It seemed to the fugitive that he had never heard so smooth and soothing a voice—soothing even in the most commonplace conversation.

"Queer names they have for their settlements up here. Do you live at Smoky Tickle, wherever it is?"

"It's on the west coast above Port-Aux-Basques. I'm going there to visit. I come from Quiddy Viddy."

"There's another. Quiddy Viddy!" For the first time in days Barkling smiled. A blast of wind and sleet rocked the car wildly. It caused him to comment: "Looks as if we were in for an all-night session!"

"From your speech you come from the States, my son. You're here at a bad time. You may be delayed. I hope we reach Howley!"

"Everybody 'hopes we'll reach Howley.' Why Howley? Are you worried?"

"This blizzard may be only just beginning. It could snow us in. At this time of year it's a risk we run. The storm comes swiftly, without warning, down from the ice. The water freezes in the engine. The cold kills the steam. The snow blows very high. Perhaps the train is covered. If food and water give out"—the man paused a moment, then added quickly—"let us pray we reach Howley. We will probably wait over at Howley. At least we could find food and warmth there."

"So—it's as bad as that?" The first leap of fear went through Barkling. "But the road ought not to dispatch trains with a storm like this in prospect."

"They cannot always know the weather, nor what will come down from the ice——"

"The ice?"

"Labrador! If the wind dies off before morning there's a plough at Little Mercy, I think. If it doesn't —I pray we're not stopping, because drifts are obstructing!"

Barkling sensed that for the past half-hour their progress had been little more than a crawl. Now the minister's words had been arrested because of a more violent bumping. An ashen-faced conductor entered and headed for the rear of the train.

"Afraid we're stuck!" he announced hoarsely.

The minister said simply but through lips that spoke as a death sentence: "Then I'm afraid we're not going to make Howley."

Three minutes later the dinky engine and coaches came to a loose, telescoping halt in confirmation. Barkling chanced to look at his watch. It was five minutes to one in the morning.

With the train halted, immediately it was the abandoned fury of the storm instead of cold wheels on colder rails, that shrieked like the banshee. Never had the American heard such wind. It was powerful enough to rock the coaches dangerously despite the ice packed into the springs. Up towards the front a window-pane crashed in with a tinkle of glass and a high, shrill whistle of gale. Instantly the sleet poured through like shavings shot from a blower. The conductor came back from the rear platform where he had been clanking at brake apparatus. He stuffed the hole with old newspaper and braced a seat cushion on end to hold it.

But the mishap had taken its portion of the heat, and the opening and closing of doors but increased the chill. Every uncurtained window was a radiating surface for cold, and as the frost began to thicken the shades were pulled to the sills. The eight passengers donned such extra wraps as they possessed; the breathing of each quickly became visible; draughts blew in from under doors and fine siftings of the storm came down through roof ventilators. In the common predicament of this halt in the journey, passengers who never would have addressed one another otherwise, now became suddenly friendly. The Salvation Army girl moved up with the two school-

teachers. The little old man with the banker's whiskers hobbled back to Barkling and the clergyman.

"This is serious!" he cackled angrily, with a combative thumping of his cane upon the floor.

"I'm afraid so," the churchman answered huskily.

The misanthrope in the low-crowned derby had left his half-breed wife and followed the banker. He had covered his misfit suit with a wrinkled, yellowish overcoat; an inch of hair worried over its upturned collar; fear distended his eyes and made his face pasty—what was uncovered by hair.

"We're somewhere between Gaff Topsail and Howley," the clergyman answered in response to his inquiries in the vernacular. "How long will we remain here? I don't know."

The misanthrope, blank-brained or dazed, went back to his wife. He raised the shade and bent across her lap, cupping his face in his hands to see out the window. He gave it up finally, blowing on beefy, gloveless hands and stamping his feet. The car was growing colder. His wife remained motionless, stoical, in her blanket-shawl—and suffered.

And outside, the wind down from Labrador increased to sixty miles an hour.

Higgins the engineer had made his way back to the coaches with Jean-Baptiste, his fireman. The two men entered with the conductor and the trainman. Tragedy was written large upon their faces.

"Maybe she blow two, tree day!" declaimed the Frenchman volubly, and he smeared the sleeve of a dirty mackinaw across his soot-penciled eyes. "If enjine freeze up already tight as hell——" He was stopped by a guttural admonition not to frighten the lady passengers. But the women had overheard. They suspected even before they overheard. They sat huddled together as for mutual protection, altogether helpless but brave as possible at the prospect.

The American's head began to ache from sleeplessness and that ever-present, all-day worry. But sleep was out of the question now. The coach was rapidly becoming a refrigerator; when the gale whistled up to a peak, it rocked the cars so alarmingly as to cause their occupants to grasp at the seat-arms.

It was uncanny, the abruptness with which the storm had burst and intensified. All the snow in the great northland had been shifted southward in a handful of hours and the wind was setting itself to the task of burying Newfoundland. The time crawled round to two o'clock. All steampipes, almost uncomfortably hot the beginning of the evening, had turned into tubes of ice. The suddenly halted passengers paced the aisle, eternally backward and forward, blowing their hands and stamping their feet to keep up circulation. All but the half-breed woman and the little old banker. The nose of the banker was now very blue. He had lapsed into silence, staring blankly ahead, chewing something toothlessly.

Then the hours began to drag—drag horribly as that predicament increased and intensified. The conductor extinguished all but two aisle lamps. "If we're due to be stuck here long, we'll need the oil; can't waste it," he apologized hoarsely. The reduced illumination only made that coach more barn-like, more barren and depressing. One of the school-teachers began to sob brokenly. "And it was the first pleasure trip I could take in seven years," she confided when they sought to soothe her.

Barkling walked up and down that flimsy coach with tight face. The subconsciousness that The Law could not reach him here temporarily eased his ragged nerves. But this sudden storm promised to develop something tragic. To pause and listen to the gale eliminated all doubt of it. Suppose they should be buried beneath the tons of snow brought on that gale from the north-

land! Suppose this gale and this sleet should keep on for days, a week!

"Isn't there any way out of this? We can't stay here and stiffen like creatures trapped in cold storage. It's unthinkable!"

"Hunthinkable, is hit? 'Ow you goin' to 'elp hit?" The man swallowed hard. "We're caught, that's hall! Might not 'appen again in a dozen years!"

"Can't some of us go for help? How far are we from a station? Any old kind of station!"

"'Ow should Hi know? Stopped larst night in the dark, didn't we? Kin Hi see through this blow any better'n you?"

"But man!—these women! I could start for help myself if I knew the country!"

"'Ow long do yer think yer'd larst, toffer? 'Alf a mile, maybe. Yer don't know Newfoundland, toffer; yer from the States. Hi been down there; hall yer knows about snow is what yer pays a shillin' to a cove to shovel hoff yer sidewalk!"

"Then we'll smash up the seats of this car and make a fire. We can't all suffer like this!"

"Hand set the whole darm train ablaze hand 'ave no shelter hat hall? Yer looks like a toffer as 'as more brains!"

"Can't we rig up some kind of a stove?"

It was through Barkling's persistence that engineer and fireman fought their way to the snowed-in engine and chopped and shovelled until they had pried up a square of sheet iron on the cab floor with wrecking axes. Seats were ripped up, the sheet was laid in the centre of the cleared space. On it with excelsior from the cushions and pieces of framework, a fire was attempted. But too much fuel was supplied in eagerness and the snow on the roof had stopped the ventilators. The gale turned it downward; the coach became a suffocating trap. Doors were opened, the wind tore through, carrying along the fire and embers in a dangerous jumble. Then a fight against the elements ensued to push out the platform drifts which had toppled inside and get the doors shut again.

Barkling was sickened by the smoke, the scent of it clinging to the car and saturating his clothes. He had shared the last of his lunch with the minister and the women and eaten snow for "water." Likewise he had run out of tobacco. Now another worry arose. The misanthrope with the half-breed wife began muttering in his beard and acting strangely. If he ran amuck——

"Dr. Brant," he asked of the minister hoarsely, "do you think there's really a chance of our perishing before this storm is over?"

The minister did not reply at once. He turned his gentle face away. The pause was more tragically affirmative than shouted panic. They were alone for the moment at the rear of the car. When the clergyman did speak, he put a question:

"Suppose there is, son?"

"Good Lord, Doctor, I'm not ready to die—yet! Not yet! Not suddenly—like this!" Dry-throated, he voiced the great distress that the minister had seen in his eyes.

"When you get ready to confide in me, son," declared the kindly judge of human nature, "don't hesitate. Perhaps I can help you. Your soul is ill, my boy, because of something you've done. Remember, it's never too late to repent."

The clergyman turned and Barkling watched him pace down the car. The younger man sank into a seat and buried his drawn face in his hands.

After that they waited for the morning.

The wind outside rose to sixty-five miles an hour.

Out of the North came all the master forces of Arctic horror. Gale succeeded gale and snow filled the heavens in tons. Two days

and nights! There is a capacity for endurance in the human spirit which none may estimate nor measure until the time of testing. Two days and nights! Easy to record, easy to read. For twelve people, women as well as men, who had started that journey so unsuspicious of disaster, they were two days and nights in that limbo of hell where all is ice.

They tore the sooty-flavoured plush from the backs and cushions of seats; the fabric was bound about freezing feet or slashed into strips for ear protection. It was Barkling who discovered that with one of the wrecking axes slats of veneer could be split from the polished ends and ceilings of the cars which because of the varnish would make them fire-like torches. Thereupon, when the darkness of storm brought early night at the close of that first day, the flare of these beacons—nearly smokeless—used for light and warmth—made the coach a still more eery place. But they solved the water problem. Snow was melted in a pail and consumed copiously. Sleep was taken in half-hour dozes; those who remained awake arousing the sleepers periodically, to prevent their freezing. In no other way could death be prevented.

Yet death did come. The little old banker passed out toward evening of that first day. His heart was too weak for such exposure. They laid him back in the corner of seat and window and covered his face as though he were sleeping.

The minister's countenance became as paper when the self-arraignment smote him that somehow he had been remiss in his duty. With the car containing the first dead, the cold so intense it could almost be tasted, the night outside booming like the Armageddon of Demons, he turned to his fellow-sufferers and said:

"Our lives are in the Almighty's hands, my friends. Let us be of good courage, yet not blind to the fact that these tiny torches, now kept alive for warmth, may become as funeral pylons. Will you all join me in a little religious service—before any of the rest of us—finish our journey—in Eternity?"

They gathered about him instinctively, wordlessly, as one who might bring them deliverance. The gale whistled and mocked him and fine snow sifted down upon his bared head.

He took a small Testament from his pocket and held it in mittened fingers. In mellow accents, solacing with superhuman attempt at courage himself, he spoke again solemnly:

"Friends of mine, it is superfluous to say we face some of life's darkest moments. Night approaches. The earth is without form, and void; the storm which has beset us, rages fiercer. Already one has gone from among us—there may be others. Let us be strong in the faith wherein is courage and face what is sent like men and women created in His image." He paused. Then he said unevenly: "Before I read, is there perhaps some common hymn with which a majority of us are familiar—some lines which may lighten the weight of blackness which enshrouds us? If any of you know such a hymn, do not be afraid to sing—the rest of us will join him as a—supplication."

The wind died to a moan. In the car for an instant came a great quiet. Then—

Clear as the tone of a bell at vespers, soft at first, growing in strength as the need brought confidence, rising higher and finer and surer as the wind rose also, throwing challenge supreme to the night and disaster—in the teeth of the cold and the tempest *came the voice of one singing!* It was a woman's voice, deep with the sweetness that breathed over Eden. It was the Salvation Army lass, pouring her creed and her faith into glory:

Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on;

The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on.
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

She stopped. The minister fumbled his book as though he could not see the pages. Suddenly he cried hoarsely, tightly:

"*Let us pray!*"

And he prayed. He cried out in his anguish of heart for strength and endurance, that the little group buried by the blizzard might hold out for that morning when the sun would shine again gloriously. For a morning always comes eventually when the sun shines again gloriously.

The words rang in John Barkling's ears with poignant familiarity. When the prayer was done he stole to the other end of the car, down in the shadow with the dead man. Ostracized by his kind for the thing he had done, he drew away from them as though by instinct.

"Eloise! Eloise!" he whispered in agony. "*I did it for you, Eloise!* If you could only understand!" No one heard him, for the wind was yowling, and up in front the minister was trying to read from his Testament.

Night was rampant again in the moorlands. There was no surcease in the tempest. It hardly seemed the sun would ever shine again. Down from the Topsails and Sykes and Seemore blast trailed upon blast, indefatigable, mocking, fraught with inevitable disaster. Yet an hour passed before the tragedy happened. Who shall say that the Almighty does not work through tragedy and aberration, through tempest and through cataclysm as well as in the trivialities in the lives and hearts of men?

Tragedy came. It came terribly. It came so terribly that John Barkling, *alias* John C. Williams, *fugitive*, scarcely realized it was his answer.

There was one among them who looked upon the dead man, frozen, and muttered in his thick brown beard. He saw the storm, the night and the suffering. He heard the clear, slender, overwhelming hymn of the Army girl and read the worst in the face of the churchman. Suffering himself beyond endurance, he also quitted the circle. He stumbled down the ghastly shadowed aisle knowing not where he was going, what he was doing. Midway of the aisle he paused. He clapped gorilla hands to his temples, knocking off his hat. Then he staggered in a little circle as though he were drunken.

The group about the pastor was broken. Skeleton faces, bluish toned and grisly, turned in his direction. And at sight of them, weird-lighted by the torches, something snapped in the dazed brain of the Newfoundlander. A cry rose above the clamour of the wind and storm —high-pitched, blood-curdling, hideous. Something snapped again. The man became obsessed.

To his hand was an axe. It was a gilded axe. For years it had hung impotent in one of the glass wall-cases. John Barkling had used it to cut the slats for the torches.

The crazed one came blindly, smashing out the illumination. The minister paused and stood rigid in his horror. Around and around his bristling head the lunatic swung the weapon. His wife ran forward, arms grappling wildly to subdue him. He struck at her! With both hands, gnarled about the helve like iron, he swung the lethal thing——

Then Barkling of Portland, Ohio, *alias* Williams, was upon him!

The trainmen tried to interfere, but to interfere was madness. The writhing, the twisting, the contorting, the gnashing, were Herculean. And possession of the axe was the *objet de combat*.

With fearful lurches the pair were thrown against the iron arms of seats, off again on the oaken floor-beams. Blood was coursing

ghastly on their features. And all was a phantom fight in semi-darkness where a group of victims awaited the outcome with life or death awarding the victor—their lives or their deaths, according to him who triumphed.

That contest could not endure. It was too appalling. Up from the *mêlée* rose the madman, and he had the weapon. John Barkling was up on one knee, recovering. With an inarticulate bellow of triumph the native tore loose. A woman screamed, high-pitched, horror-heightened, hysterical! John Barkling dodged his head, sought to grip in under. The axe descended.

They fell upon him then, the men of that train crew; they fell upon the native and the women turned away from the spectacle. They got the axe, but not the man. He hit out with his barked fists mightily. He slashed and scratched and struck and swore. And, numbers against him, he broke away.

Down the car he plunged while the others fell across themselves and staggered. He opened the door and the gale crashed upon him. He turned with a yell and an arm-sweep of hatred. Then, hatless, he leaped to the sleet and the darkness. He was gone and there was none to follow him. Darkness blotted his crazy turkey-tracks off into drifts and oblivion.

The minister lifted young John in his arms. The fugitive opened his eyes. The conductor held a lantern.

"It's all right," he said. And he smiled. "He got me. Doctor, but—it doesn't matter. Don't try to hold me, Doctor. Just lay my head on a cushion."

"My boy! My boy! Where is it you're injured?"

"I ducked my head, but it took me in the back, Doctor. Don't move me if you can help it. It'll be over in a minute. It can't last more than that."

They straightened him with his head on a cushion. And the Doctor realized that for the first time since the start of this ill-fated journey the soul-sickness had gone from the eyes of the fugitive and the deep trouble from his countenance. It seemed that he was almost smiling. It was only relief from the terrific mental strain at last. Barkling closed those eyes, normal now, for a few moments. Then he opened them and said, as levelly as his growing agony would let him:

"Boys, leave me alone with the Doctor for a spell; I guess I'm going and there's some things I want to say——"

They withdrew, reluctantly.

"You women, all of us, better move into the smoking car," ordered the conductor.

They obeyed him like little children, even the rest of the train crew. And Barkling was left alone with the man of religion. The lantern hung over a chair-arm and dropped a frail light on his face. The fugitive felt for the Doctor's hand—and found it.

"Doctor," he said simply, "you'll learn I'm a crook if you live through this safely. I feel that you will—and I'm dying. I want to tell you just how it happened. It will help me a little bit. And then, I want you to write to a man named Lougee in Ohio—Portland, Ohio. If you can ship my body back there——"

"I'll do my utmost," the clergyman promised.

"Doctor," was the next effort, "did you ever love a woman? Love her so that you'd turn fugitive for her if need be? Doctor, I've known and loved a woman like that, and I'm up here running from the law in consequence. I can't tell you everything, Doctor. *Some* details aren't my property to disclose. But, Doctor, I did what I thought was the best thing to do, seeing I was such a disappointment to her—for her sake—because I loved her and wanted her to have the money to be happy—if she wanted it that way. She wanted so much to be happy, Doctor. She wanted so much to

enjoy life's beautiful things and—and—know an existence that I realized at last I could never give her——"

The outside gale died mercifully to a moan. The flame of the lantern sputtered on the wick. A gentle-faced old minister, purple with cold himself, forgot his stiffening limbs and heard a dying man's confession.

Hours and hours it seemed, Dr. Brant remained seated upon that car-cushion down on the floor when that "confession" was ended. An address-book had slipped between his knees, Lougee's name and town scrawled in clumsy mittened writing. When he came finally to himself he glanced down on the fugitive's face.

"God won't deal harshly with you, John Barkling. You didn't tell me the whole truth about your felony, but perhaps you couldn't. One thing I *know*, however: you did what you did in love, regardless of your light. Let God judge the morals of the piece—in the last great analysis I believe you were a *MAN!*"

The wind wailed softly over the moorlands. The flame in the lantern burned blue. Almost irrational himself from exposure, fatigue and shock, the Doctor secured his notebook, forced his pain-shot limbs to bear his weight, took the lantern from the chair-arm, and moved toward the forward door. But before opening that door he turned about. Like a benediction he spoke his words of adieu to the husk of John Barkling lying in the shadow with a relaxation and that peace upon his features which for ever baffles human understanding.

"Greater love hath no man than this," spoke the minister, "than that he should lay down his life for his friends. Good night, John Barkling. The night is dark and we are far from home, indeed. But I feel the Morning will be glorious. God could not will it otherwise."

A blustering squall of snow. Quiet. The car was velvety with blackness. In that void of space and peace seemed sounds not of the wind and distance.

There is an aftermath to this record. There should be an aftermath. For this is a world in which action and reaction are equal; a world of spoils and payments; a world of rewards and fairies.

There are few Main Streets in the ocean-flavoured villages of Newfoundland. Homes are constructed high on rock, rule-of-thumb location, facing always the amethyst distances where men go down in ships. Drab, flat-roofed, unattractive structures most of them are, four walls and a roof, with rooms inside, containing only such furniture as is absolutely essential for human occupancy.

Yet in the fishing town of Quiddy Viddy on the eastern coast, several miles above St. John's, was one domicile built with an eye to something more than simple animal requisites. Even in the searing winds off Labrador, snow nettled, it was low-hung, soft-lined, invitingly sociable. The path which climbed to its gate wound romantically among hoary boulders, and that gate was arched overhead, almost hidden by a gossamer of shimmering vine-leaves in the summer.

A stranger drove into Quiddy Viddy one night in the weeks that followed, paid the driver who had brought him from St. John's, approached the high home with ruddy light in its windows and knocked loudly on the door. A white-haired man responded, one hand shielding the chimney-top of a flaring lamp.

"Dr. Brant?" asked the stranger. "Lougee's my name. I've come up from the States to see you."

The minister almost dropped the lamp.

"You're the one I wrote—about John Barkling?"

"That's me! After I got your letter I had to come. The townfolks made me."

"Come in," invited the Doctor.

Detective Lougee shed his bear-

like cap and ulster in the warm and homely sitting-room. The clergyman moved about dazedly. He summoned a gaunt woman from somewhere in the rear rooms or kitchen.

"A gentleman has come to see us from the States, Methala. Will you get him some hot tea and supper?"

Lougee, warming bulbous fingers before the squat, genial stove, put a blunt question.

"Where's John Barkling's body? So I can take it back with me to the States, ain't it?"

The minister nodded, his manner still vague. "I had it embalmed as best our meagre facilities permit, sir. And it's coffined and boxed for the journey in our vault awaiting the winter break-up. Pardon my surprise to see you here, sir. As I said in my letter, I expected to meet you somewhere down in Halifax or Boston in the spring."

"'Sall right. I give your letter to the Portland papers—Portland, Ohigher, y'understand. Then the townfolks made me come, winter or no winter. Lemme thaw out an' I'll tell you all about it."

He thawed and he ate. After that they drew chairs before the stove and smoked. There was a little battered clock with a tinkling chime on the mantel behind the stove-pipe. From seven-thirty its wispy hands swung round to nearly ten-fifteen before Lougee reached the heart of the narrative which on the Doctor's part had been less than conjecture.

"Doctor," said the detective reflectively, "I been a cop for twenty-eight years, one place or another. I've chased some pretty bad actors and cornered some pretty tough birds. Portland, Ohigher, ain't such an awful big burg, but even small towns can develop some mighty big cases. Strange cases, too. Jack Barkling's was one of 'em. And I guess it's the saddest I've run against in all my twenty-eight years."

"Saddest!"

"God's truth, parson! Listen—did he say much about his wife?"

"I understand he absconded with funds of the bank which employed him as teller—for her sake—because he couldn't get ahead fast enough to make her happy. A pathetic sort of sacrifice, that; but all of us see life differently. And that hounded look in his eyes——"

"Wasn't on account o' me chasin' him, parson. Your true crook hardens after a time. He gets hard-boiled and rat-eyed. Jack wasn't rat-eyed now, was he?"

"Most assuredly *not!*"

"No. What you saw, parson, was soul-sickness—heart-hunger — not in remorse for what he'd done, but longin' for a dame he'd loved and lost. He was true to his love to the end."

"The end? She died? He didn't tell me that!"

"He didn't know. His runnin' spared him *that!*" The detective fingered his dead pipe, turning it over and over. He seemed gathering courage to proceed, to show a side of his nature which was difficult. A few moments of pregnant silence and then it came out: "Parson," said he, "I'm no poet, and I couldn't preach much of a sermon; I'm just a fat old slob of a cop whose job is makin' the cantankerous toe the chalk-mark. Yet I got three kids and I see they go to Sunday-school regular. But more'n that, parson, I'm sayin' I believe in human nature, too—my feller-man. Strange for a cop to say that, ain't it?—him runnin' up against all the cranks and crooks and lost sheep in society as a business. And yet I got to say it. Because lookin' at the world after dealin' year after year with its crooks and human dregs, the small number o' rotten folks there is in it, compared with the millions that *ain't* rotten, just strikes me with a smash. The average man's a straight-shooter, parson, and square and warm-hearted and on the level. He may have his peculiarities and faults—all of us do. But dig down to the bedrock of his soul *and the dam'*

thing's sound! And that was Barkling!—like the average man, worshippin' God, keepin' the law, payin' his bills. And a dam' good feller beside.

"Parson, in this day of crime waves by the small minority, and cheap jazz and cheaper divorces and rantin' radicals—it's chokin' to meet up with a chap who does a big thing in the dark, expectin' nobody's ever goin' to know but himself and his Maker. Parson—the woman was a female rotter!—cheap as dirt and shallow as a pan!"

This last came out explosively. It startled Dr. Brant so that he cried: "What woman?"

"The woman John Barkling married—the girl that sent him travellin'—with me after him! That's the part he neglected to tell you. Within a month after they was married she commenced demandin' her own way and gettin' it. Soon she was back at her job in the bank beside her husband—it was in the same bank he'd met her, you know—givin' it out he wasn't man enough to make money to support her and buy her all the doodads she wanted. Made a regular wash-pot out of him, she did. And the poor feller got frantic with thinkin' of her unhappiness. For a year it went on with her growin' worse and worse. Then it happened."

"That what happened?"

"Old, old story, parson. The arrival o' the 'handsomer man!' And to think he was only a barber! Can you beat it?"

"A *barber!* And she was untrue to John—to Barkling?"

"She run away with the barber at last, up to Chicago. That's where she killed herself when the barber tired of her."

"Killed herself!" The minister sat upright. "Man, what are you telling me?"

"Only what happened, parson. Sad case, sad case! She killed herself after writing back tellin' Jack that after all she loved him. We opened the letter because we was after Jack by that time to bring him back and make him stand trial. All over the country we'd chased him, but he'd dodged us. Did it on his savings, too. The woman had got the money, o' course, every penny!—though how could we know it? Up to the time her letter come, we thought she'd skipped with him—that they was together. But the letter explained everything about her disloyalty after all Jack'd done for her and—well, it gimme a hunch Jack was in New York city. I went there and started doin' the hotels. You say he seen me and started travellin' again! Oh, well! Life's like that, I suppose. But if he died lovin' *her*, and she died sorry and lovin' *him*, I guess by this time they've found each other. Let's hope so, anyhow!"

"Yes," whispered the minister.

"However, the drama's closed at last, and I'm here to get Jack's remains and give 'em decent burial. I guess the townfolks is sorry for all they said and did; it's taught 'em a pretty stiff lesson. But oh!—if I could only have caught Jack before he skun out o' New York thinkin' I was after him with a warrant for his arrest."

"Weren't you?"

"No! 'Course I wasn't. I thought I made it plain I went to New York to find him and tell him all was known because of his wife's letter."

"But I don't understand," pleaded the other.

"I went to New York," declared Lougee explosively, "to keep him from going through the rest of life a fugitive. It was his wife who swiped the money, not him! Swiped it to finance happiness with the barber. All he did when he learned it was to fix things so it'd look like he did it and skip in the night on his savin's—because he loved her and wanted to protect her name!"

"Oh," said the minister weakly.

And the clock ticked, ticked, ticked—on into Eternity.

William Dudley Pelley.

Tom Laidlaw's Treachery

By Frank Hubert

"There came a loud, rumbling crash, a scorching blast of air as hot as fire, faint cries from the distance. Men raced past him as he stood there, his pick still gripped in his clenched hands.

"'Th' pit's fired!' yelled one man who raced along, his face blanched, his eyes starting from his head. 'Get to th' shaft, Tom, quick.'"

A MAN moved out of the shadows and crossed the road as the little garden gate clanged to. The watcher had been waiting impatiently for half an hour, ever since, in fact, he had halted abruptly at the sight of two figures, a man's and a woman's, silhouetted against the light of the opened door. He had watched the two come to the gate with distended eyes, had stowed himself away to view the entire proceedings, and as he watched, his lips had grown dry and parched, his breath had come pantingly. There had been a suggestive sound just before the gate was opened and shut, and as the man's figure emerged from the garden the woman's had run nimbly back to the house, with a curious lightness in its step. It had only been a scene that might have been witnessed any night in the Tyneside village: a lover and his lass saying "Good night!" but the watcher felt a demon of anger clamour at his heart. In any other circumstances he would have passed on carelessly as soon as the door had opened for the first time, but that cottage was the home of Emma Grimshaw, and she was the only woman of courting age in the house. Therefore the evidence went to show that it was Emma and no other who had spent that erotic half-hour at the garden gate. The one question was: who was the man? But Laidlaw, who had watched, named him at once.

"Goin' home, Jack?" he asked with forced cordiality. The man addressed laughed happily, a clear, mellow laugh that caused his questioner to writhe inwardly.

"Ay, lad, I'm for whooam. It's a fine night, Tom lad. Never knew a finer so far as I can tell."

"I hadn't noticed it was above the ordinary," growled Tom Laidlaw. "It's breeding up for thunder weather. No great fun workin' underground. Th' pit'll be like dynamite."

"Why, it's a night for angels, by gum," quoth Jack Trumann, and broke out into a lilting rollicking song. "A night such as I've never seed. Give us your hond, Tom. I'm th' happiest man i' th' warld."

"Got made overseer?" queried Laidlaw, and did not attempt to hide the sarcasm in his voice. "Or hast come into brass?"

"Neither one nor t'other, Tom. Som'at far better nor both. Emma's gi'en me her promise. She's th' finest wench up Tyneside, by gum, and she'll wed me." So engrossed in his happiness was the miner that he never heard the stifled curse of his companion, never saw the ugly clenching and unclenching of a knotted hand. The evil voice in Laidlaw's heart was clamouring more insistently than ever: "Fell him, lad, fell him. Kick the living soul out of him. Who's to know? Clear the path, and the girl's yours." But a man advancing from the direction of the cluster of cottages near

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the pit's mouth gave them both a loud "Good night!" and the voice was silenced for the moment. Laidlaw meditated deeply.

"So it was her and you kissing and spooning theer, was it? I heard ye, Jack. Ye've sneaked in behind me back and stolen th' girl I love from me; but I'll be even with ye yet, you see if I'm not." His voice rose shrilly, and the faint light of a foggy moon showed his working face. Had Trumann turned he might have noticed the man's lips were almost purple, that one hand was clenched over his left side. But the lover was too full of joy to notice anything, and his song rose unwaveringly. "She's yours," sang his heart cheerfully. "You've fairly won her, lad."

He had won her fairly. Emma Grimshaw had not been blind to the personal appearance of the young collier; he was a straight-living man, whose visits to the Collier's Arms were few and far between. Not a soul in all Merston but had a good word to say of Jack Trumann, from the bent and bowed old vicar, who worked hard to instil some decency into his flock, to the pitboys themselves. A hard worker, a clean liver, an honest man, that was Trumann's record, and some of us, reader, might do worse than aim at such a standard.

And now the deed was done—he was Emma's promised man. He had settled it there by the gate in the darkness, and had taken the price of his faithful service from the girl's red lips. He had been gripped by the hand by the girl's father as he went away, for old Grimshaw had read the signs aright. He had wished his future son-in-law well, and had counted himself a lucky man. Yes, it was all over. There remained only a little period of waiting, just enough to enable him to add to his savings sufficiently to furnish the modest home, and then he and Emma would be cried in church, and he would take her home to share his lot for evermore. No wonder the young collier sang joyfully—no wonder the tempting voice spoke insidiously within the soul of his companion.

"Yes, I'll get even wi' ye, Jack Trumann," reiterated Laidlaw. "I'd marked Emma Grimshaw for my wife, and I'll have her yet."

"Don't talk fulish, man," said Jack genially, checking his song. "It was all fair and above-board. I coorted her straight; you'd as good a chance as me. Let bygones be bygones, and wish me well. Here, shake honds, man." He thrust forward a huge paw, but Laidlaw let it remain untaken. Was it for this he had scraped and stinted himself for four years past, ever since Emma Grimshaw had grown into a woman? Was it for this his account at the bank had reached such glorious proportions? Never. There must be some way of getting his own. Emma was his own, and but for this interloping giant the way would have been clear to her heart. He tried to think, but the red mist that rose before his eyes precluded coherent thought. Mostly he felt the desire to smash in the smiling face of his rival, to rain blow after blow on the high-carried head. Let Trumann beware, he muttered. He had made an enemy that night, an enemy who would never rest until the man and the woman had been parted.

"Well, if ye won't be civil, Tom," said Trumann, after a while, "my way lies here, thine's theer. Good night, lad. I'm sorry ye've taken it so to heart, but cheer up. There's a sight of other women in Merston."

"Ay, but theer's only one for me," grunted Laidlaw with a curse, as he flung off down the side street, and left the happy man to pursue his way alone to his mother's house. As the dark figure was swallowed up in the night, Laidlaw stopped and shook a savage fist.

"I'll get even, curse ye!" he snarled. "I don't know how yet, but I'll get my chance." Had he but known, the chance was nearer than he thought. All that night he

By Frank Hubert

lay tossing restlessly on his bed, planning and plotting. Now he would half rise with the intention of speeding to Trumann's house and killing him where he slept, but he flung down again as the reflection came that, were he to do so, he would stand a murderer confessed, and what hope had he of winning Emma for himself if the shadow of the gallows stood between? He must work his plan cunningly, so that no suspicion might fall on him. How was he to do it?

"I'll wait till morning," he mused, and his heart beat so thickly as almost to choke him. "There's a hundred chances in th' pit to one above ground. But I'll be even yet." He slept not a wink that night, but when he arose at the summons of the hooter and took pick and lamp from the places where they hung, his eyes glittered evilly, and his face was as white as death. A plan had begun to take root in his mind—a plan that would be quite effectual. If only circumstances favoured him, he might yet find a way to winning the hand of the woman he coveted.

II

Trumann hewed away at the solid coal with mighty arms and a light heart. As he worked he sang jovially, for the memories of the evening past were pleasant. His eye summoned up constant visions of Emma's pretty face, arch and tempting, times without number he found himself pursing up his lips to take the kiss proffered by the girl's tantalizing lips. He worked as for a wager, and the loosened coal rattled down at such a rate as almost to impede his efforts. But when the truck came along the side-working, he lent his aid to the lad, and the coal flew from ground to truck in a never-ceasing shower. This working was almost exhausted, a few more days would bring him to the stone, and then he would be compelled to strike out a new tunnel in some other direction. But there was time enough to think about that—meanwhile, the harder he worked the sooner Emma would be his very own. It was work to try the endurance of a Trojan, but the stalwart miner made light of it. Half-bent as he was, he worked as gaily as if standing upright, seldom if ever breaking off to go to the wide working from which this small *cul-de-sac* led to get a breath of clearer air. His position was almost at the extreme limit of the pit. Nearly a mile lay between him and the shaft, other workings radiated from the main drive, and in one of these Laidlaw was working with frantic fury. A few other men were busy here and there, but the vast majority of the colliers employed at the Seacombe Pit were toiling in other directions.

"Th' air's gettin' good and fresh," ruminated Trumann after a while. "It's funny. I thowt it 'ud get staler like, 'cause theer's thunder about up on top. But it's kindly and fresh, I do believe." He struck with renewed vigour a side blow at a face of coal, and stepped back from the ensuing rush. The air was decidedly fresher; it fanned his cheek in a wholesome fashion. He worked on, tearing down the coal in vast showers, wondering a little at the strangeness of what had occurred, but hardly thinking what its cause might be. And meanwhile the air in the galleries behind him was momentarily growing thicker and more inflammable. More than one of the workers noticed it, and cast apprehensive glances at his Davy lamp; but men must work, no matter though an awful death lurks ever beside them, and they toiled on stolidly, desirous of filling many a hungry mouth. Laidlaw was the first man to notice the fouling of the air; skilled in all that had to do with colliery work, he tried to think how this matter might be turned to his own account. He was a selfish man; to him it mattered little that a dozen might die so that his end should be gained. He worked on

with compressed lips and blazing eyes. If an explosion should occur —what then?

Why, then—Trumann's gallery was farthest away from the shaft, and in consequence his rival's chances of escape were more remote than those of any other man. But Trumann was a strong man, he might win to safety where weaker men would fail. If there were an explosion—if Trumann did not escape! But how to make sure that the man would perish? He stopped short, breathing heavily. Yes, that might be a way out of the dilemma. No one would be able to place it at his door, if he did his work shrewdly. He licked his lips furtively and looked over his shoulder. It seemed to him that someone must surely have heard that swift inspiration that had come to him as if spoken by a human voice. But no one was there.

There came a loud, rumbling crash, a scorching blast of air as hot as fire, faint cries from the distance. Men raced past him as he stood there, his pick still gripped in his clenched hands. Had the miraculous happened after all?

"Th' pit's fired!" yelled one man who raced along, his face blanched, his eyes starting from his head. "Get to th' shaft, Tom, quick."

Laidlaw hesitated. From the direction of the shaft came the rumble of falling coal; his quick instinct told him that the roof was caving in. In a little while it might be impossible to get through the gallery to safety, but Trumann had not yet come past. Yes, though, there he was, running like a greyhound towards the shaft. Laidlaw followed him, his pick in his hands, the grim idea working balefully in his brain. There was a faint cry from ahead, behind came the scorching blast of the flames. The pit was blazing hard. Yes, but that was not all. The roof was falling in a solid mass. A few Davy lamps had been left behind in the confusion, and Laidlaw could see that the way to safety was almost closed. Just before him was the bulky form of his rival—what had to be done must be done at once. He gripped his pick still tighter, and quickened his lurching stride. Then a new thought came. In the event of its being a false alarm, they would find the—they would find the—he threw the pick away, snatched up a great lump of coal, and ran close behind Trumann. The chunk of coal flew up, poised for a moment, then fell with a sickening crash. Trumann dropped and lay like a dead man; Laidlaw, with one horrified glance at what he had done, with a fearful horror in his heart, raced forward, slipped through a fast-closing aperture, heard behind him the dull crash of settling debris, and said that he was saved. A vast wall of fallen coal shut Trumann off from safety, even if he were still alive; the racing flames would complete the work, and all traces of his awful crime would be lost to view for ever. The men who shared the ascending cage with Laidlaw stared at him curiously.

"Close shave, Tom," they said, marking his haunted eyes and working lips.

"Ay," he muttered, drawing one hand across his sweating brow. "Is everybody out?"

"It looks like it, lad, but we'll see when th' roll's called."

They mustered together in the changing house, and the overseer called the names of the men on the shift. All answered to the cry, all save one. Jack Trumann was missing—no one remembered to have seen him.

"He were goin' to wed Emma Grimshaw, too," said one of the men. "he told me this morning. Poor lad, poor lass! Happen he's better off nor she is, though."

A group of women had gathered outside the pit; a wave of expectation seemed to sway them as the word went forth. All were saved—but one. Who was the one? Jack Trumann.

By Frank Hubert

"Stand back theer," screamed one brawny woman, pressing vigorously with outstretched arms. "Here's a girl fainted. Stand back! Give her air."

"Who's fainted?" cried someone, and the answer was: "Emma Grimshaw. They say her lad's still down th' pit."

The hush of sympathy spread, but here and there could be heard the sound of a stifled sob. Not a woman there but knew what the awful blow of hearing someone near and dear was lost to human sight was like. They lifted the poor, limp figure and carried it tenderly away, weeping the slow, hard tears of the northern women, and drew her back to a consciousness that was less kindly than the senselessness she had left.

"Has he—is he——?" she asked pitifully, but they only shook their heads.

They were already busy in the changing house. The mine manager had reached the spot, the doctor, too, was there. Volunteers were called for, and responded eagerly. So long as there was a single chance that Trumann lived, there were men eager and ready to save. They were lowered into the pit, taking their appliances with them, and the work of salvation commenced. Only a few feet could be gained at a time, but at last the rescuers reached a sheer wall of fallen coal.

A woman hastened with the news to the cottage where Emma Grimshaw lay, and the girl rose from her bed and tore out into the rainy night, to join the throng about the pit-brow, who craned forward eagerly awaiting the slightest word of hope.

All through that night they remained there in suspense, but with the dawn came men who shook their heads ominously.

"Th' pit's afire t'other side the fall. We darsen't break right through till th' workings is flooded." And then Emma Grimshaw gave up all hope. In that inferno of fire her lover must have been scorched to a cinder without a chance for life. The iron of it entered into her soul; her roses faded, she grew silent, almost morose. The days went by, little by little the blazing portion of the mine was isolated and flooded, within a month the barrier was removed. A scene of burnt-out awfulness met the eyes of the searchers, but that was all. Jack Trumann had been burnt to ashes, no trace of him remained.

III

Laidlaw was a cunning man; now that his rival was removed he was not fool enough to spoil his chances by too great haste. When the long nights brought him visions of a falling figure, menaced horribly by surging flames, he shut his eyes doggedly and turned his face to the wall, summoning up pleasanter visions of Emma Grimshaw as his wife. Not until the news was told that all hope had been given up did he venture to intrude on the girl's grief, and then he sought her out tenderly.

"I thowt ye might like to hear what it wor like down there," he said softly. "I tried to find Jack Trumann, but though I stopped till th' very last he didn't appear. He must ha' been felled and stunned afore he got to me. And though I tried to get back tiv him I couldn't face th' fire."

He talked feelingly, with evident sympathy for her loss, and the girl heard him as in a dream. Her grief was stony, she shed no tears; it seemed as if her warm, loving heart had been clutched by an icy hand and turned itself to ice. But she listened—that was something gained. She asked no questions, and more than once Laidlaw was embarrassed to find her wide eyes fixed reflectively on his face. It seemed to him at such times as if the girl were reading right down into his soul, where the hideous truth lay hidden.

He steeled himself against this

belief, gradually cunning overpowered latent fear; he assumed an air of protecting tenderness to the girl who had been widowed before she was a wife. It was slow and tedious work, but Laidlaw was a purposeful man. He had committed the worst crime in the calendar for the sake of winning the woman of his heart; he was not to be deterred from carrying his point by reason of a lack of progress.

So a year went by, and the village began to forget that such a tragedy had ever happened. Trumann's name was never mentioned; a roof-fall in another section of the mine killed three men and obliterated all memory of the lesser disaster; Laidlaw persevered weekly in his visits to the girl, and slowly broke down the barriers of her reserve.

Fate was kind to the adventurous. Emma's mother had died a year before the accident, now her father went out like a snuffed candle. His constitution, worn out and undermined by constant working in the noxious atmosphere of the pit, refused to stand the demands made upon it by a growing winter; the girl followed his humble coffin to its last resting-place, and said that she stood alone in the world. Now was Laidlaw's chance. He did not deliberately advocate marriage; but he called frequently on the girl in the cottage where she had taken up her abode, and began to draw pictures of the beauty of real home. Emma listened listlessly at first, but the one cottage open to her—all the others were overcrowded—was a particularly grim and bare place. Laidlaw's glowing pictures of a snug parlour with a blazing fire began to have an effect on her, somehow; daily the discomforts of her present home seemed greater and greater. At last the murderer said the time was ripe.

"Leave it, lass," he pleaded, waving his hand about the unsightly kitchen. "It's not worth it." Emma stirred, her instinct told her what was coming.

"Share a home wi' me, Emma," said Laidlaw boldly. "I've saved well; I've a fine bit o' cash put by i' th' bank. It isn't worth fretting for, all this."

"I've loved one lad i' my life, and there's not room i' my heart to love another," pleaded the poor girl with a heart-broken sigh. "I'll stop as I am, Tom Laidlaw. Eh, Jack lad, Jack, if only you'd niver been killed i' that awful fashion." A sudden pang of remorse shook Laidlaw as with an ague; he put one hand to his side, where a sharp spasm of pain had almost stopped his breathing. These spasms had been more frequent of late; the haunting dread of the dead man's eyes seemed to have weakened the man who had killed him. But he drew in a deep breath, and laughed defiantly. The truth was in his own mind alone, not another living soul knew aught of the tragedy of the pit.

"I'm not asking ye for love, lass," he pleaded. "I'm asking ye to sarve yourself, not me. It's 'cause I've loved ye so much, lass, always. Share a home wi' me; marry me—poor Jack wouldn't wish ye to keep single all your life for his sake. Nay, lass, what's th' good o' fretting out your life this here fashion? Marry me, an' let's start fresh. I'll be a good husband, Emma. Fretting won't bring th' dead back to life, nohow."

She gave him no answer, but, on the other hand, she did not order him to leave the house.

On his next visit he opened the subject once more, and skilfully hinted to the girl that youth was flying; that soon age would creep upon them unawares, that lonely age was the worst thing in the world. In vain Emma tried to keep faithful to the dead man, the living urged his claims constantly. Finally:

"It's no use holding out longer, Tom," she whispered. "I'm feared of old age, lonely age. I'll never be able to love ye, lad, but if ye'll teach me to forget this aching emptiness, I'll make you a good wife."

And so it was arranged, and Laidlaw, outwardly pitying, inwardly jubilant, went straightway to the parsonage, and said the work of his lifetime had not been altogether in vain.

IV

It was a raw cold morning at Merston, with a heavy rain falling. As the local train drew up at the single platform of the little station a tall man alighted, a man dressed in a rough but comfortable overcoat, the collar of which was drawn closely above his ears. Beneath the soft slouch hat he wore a white bandage showed; the trifle of cheek exposed by the coat-collar seemed tanned beyond the ordinary. He looked about him eagerly, and scanned the face of the solitary porter with deep-searching eyes. But the lad had been appointed to Merston only the previous summer, and, with a shake of his head, the new arrival gave up his ticket, drew in a deep breath of the raw, coal-dust laden air, and tramped heavily down the wooden stairs. From time to time he gazed about in a half-bewildered fashion, objects that were familiar seemed to have grown half unfamiliar. But he took an unerring way down the black muddy lane, and emerged in the main street of the village without meeting a single soul. He walked on, his step growing lighter, but time after time he passed one hand across his eyes, as though newly-awakened from sleep. He made this gesture when he paused outside a well-remembered cottage, and read a sign in the window: "To let." It was strange the village should be so quiet, even when work at the pit was in full blast there was generally a woman to be seen somewhere. But as he pondered heavily the bell of the little church half a mile away began to clang loudly, discordantly, and he looked towards the sound. Then he saw a hawker's barrow coming along the road, the hawker himself trudged alongside the donkey, his shoulders bent.

"How is it, lad?" queried the new-comer. "Owt wrang i' th' place? It seems mortally quiet."

"Hasn't ta heard, then?" asked the hawker. "There's a wedding on at th' church. All th' women's gone —it's no place for a honest man to do business to-day. Hang sich weddings, anyway, I say."

"A wedding?" asked the new-comer. "Ay, a wedding." "Whose, might a man ask?"

"Nay, I knows nowt about sich like things. A woman o' this place an' a man, that's all I know. Nay, but I do remember now. Emma—Emma—her what was th' daughter o' old Grimshaw what died a while agone. Shoo's marryin' an old flame o' hers, as like as not, since her own man war killed i' th' pit. Ay, I have it now. Laidlaw his name is. He bought a cask of ile off me to-morrow was a week. Hey, what's up?"

The man who had stopped him had suddenly broken away from his side, and was tearing at the top of his speed towards the church. The bell was ringing slowly now; it seemed as if he would never cover the distance. No one was at the door of the church when he reached it, but from inside came the droning of a voice. A confused murmur of other sounds dinned in upon his ears; he darted in, and leaned against a pillar, gasping, trying to regain his breath.

The old parson cleared his voice: "If any man knows just cause or impediment——" he said, and Jack Trumann gathered himself together.

"I forbid the banns," he cried in a great voice. There was a shriek from the chancel, a turning of faces, a confusion of tongues. Women had risen and were standing in their seats, craning their necks.

"If you will kindly come into the vestry——" began the vicar slowly, but Jack Trumann strode forward, and as he strode threw back the collar of his greatcoat. Then, in a

voice that seemed to ring from the very roof in accents of condemnation, he cried: "That man tried to murder me; I forbid the banns!"

"You make a grave accusation, sir," said the parson mildly, but with pity on his face.

"There's proof enough," cried Trumann, and pointed with an unwavering finger towards the bridegroom. All eyes followed his gaze, and the gasp of horror that succeeded the gesture was like the soughing of the wind. Laidlaw was clawing at his collar with trembling hands, his face was a clayish-yellow colour, his eyes were protruding from his head. He tottered forward a pace or two, threw up his arms, gave an indescribable sound from his open throat, then the purplish hue of his lips faded entirely, the whole face became white as chalk, he fell forward without another sound and lay at the feet of the man he had tried to murder.

Trumann looked about him as the congregation flocked forward. A hundred hands were outstretched; he heeded none of them, but walked with a firm step to where Emma Grimshaw leaned against the chancel rail. She never moved as he approached, save that she stood upright when he was within a couple of paces. Not one in the church but held her breath.

"What's it mean, Emma?" asked Trumann thickly. "Didst 'ee think me dead, then?"

"Ay, Jack," she whispered fearfully. Then he put out one hand and touched her arm. At that contact, as if the horror were removed from her soul, she swayed and lay like a dead thing in his arms.

"He allus had a rotten heart," said one of the congregation, pointing to the dead body of Laidlaw. "It mun ha' failed him when he seed what he seed." And that was what the verdict was. But long before the verdict had been spoken Trumann had told his tale, as much of it as he knew. How the dastardly blow had not struck him totally unconscious, but had left him so dazed as to render him incapable of flying farther, and that a strange instinct had led him towards the working where he had been employed, to find there that the explosion had brought down a wall of coal that left a clear passage into the workings of an old, disused mine. How unconsciousness had come upon him there, and how he had remembered nothing further until a week ago, when he woke up in a ship's forecastle, not understanding anything, to be told that over a year had passed since he had gone aboard the craft as she lay at the coal-shoots in a little port not far from Merston, and had there been found wounded and stowed away. How they had tended him, and had found he knew nothing of himself or of the reasons that brought him aboard the steamer; how he had grown well and strong, and had taken to the new life, working to take the place of a dying stoker: how he had forgotten all about his past life until the day of his awakening, which had followed on a fall he had had down the stokehold ladder when the ship was wallowing through a Biscay swell. And how his first instinct had been to write to her to let her know the truth, but that the ship had been detained in the river by fog, and he had come on by the first train.

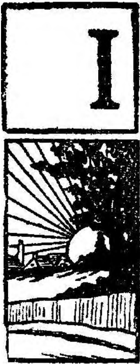
There was much to be told, and half of it all had to be imagined, for of the year that had elapsed between the two blows on the head Trumann remembered nothing. But the doctor heard of the case, and followed it up, to find that it had been merely a question of suspended memory. The blow that had almost settled the miner's earthly career had sent his memory into abeyance; Trumann had even forgotten his own name. The second blow had restored his faculties—but why prolong the evidence indefinitely? Trumann had come back in the nick of time, and Laidlaw's case had been taken in hand by a Justice not of earth.

FRANK HUBERT.

The Good-natured Lady

By Philip Gibbs

"I'll be hanged if she didn't call at the club one day and tell the hall porter to fetch me out. Thrust four pounds of bacon into my arms! 'There you are, Nunky!' she said, with the hall porter grinning like a Cheshire cat. 'The best gammon from one of my pedigree pigs, and I'll take the money now, if you don't mind!' 'You're a brazen hussy,' I said. 'You're no better than a gipsy.'"



IT was only by degrees that I became aware of the activities of one of the most remarkable ladies I know in England to-day. The first news about her, apart from my general knowledge of her family, which belongs to English history, was given to me by young Ronald Verney, the poet. Most people will remember his bitter and passionate verses which created some literary sensation during the war.

"Hallo, young fellow!" I said, when I met him one day in St. James's Street. "I haven't seen any of your stuff lately."

He was shabbily dressed in a light suit, rather baggy at the knees and frayed at the elbows, but he looked better in health than when I had last seen him—more bronzed, with brighter eyes and with less worry in them.

He answered, with his slow, rather shy, smile:

"No, I haven't been writing much lately. Only a few sonnets now and then, and not for the market. I'm doing better work."

"Literary?"

"No. Though it's improving my style. I'm assistant pig-keeper to Lady Elizabeth Buckland."

His eyes twinkled in response to my shout of laughter, but he spoke quite gravely again, and with a kind of mystical enthusiasm.

"Betty's the most wonderful woman in the world. My sister and I worship the ground she treads on—and she treads on quite a lot."

"Meaning what?" I asked.

"Oh, she tramps about the Buckland estate most days, looking after things. Pigs, poultry, poets, the Russian prince, poor relations and the cows. She never tires. . . . How's your wife?"

Presently he raised a brown hand and sloped away without further conversation.

That reference to the Russian prince gave me a kind of clue to his rather vague explanation. I remembered seeing a picture of Prince Suvarov in one of the Sunday papers. He was depicted in a rough suit, with a gardener's apron, and he was trundling a wheelbarrow. Underneath it was the caption: "Russian Prince as gardener at Buckland Hall, Sussex."

It attracted my attention because I happened to know this particular prince among all the exiles who had poured into England after the war. I had met him two or three times on the island of Prinkipo, near Constantinople, among a crowd of officers who were living there as refugees, at British expense, after the defeat of Wrangel in the Crimea. A tall, handsome fellow, not unlike the late Tsâr, to whom he was some distant kinsman, though not so weak-looking.

The next time I heard of Lady Elizabeth was at the club. I was sitting over the coffee-cups after lunch with General Brandingham, utterly forgotten now as the man who lost a British regiment to the Boers with the greatest possible gallantry and according to the strict rules of Sandhurst warfare. Seventy years of age, but still with a straight back and undimmed eyes, wonder-

fully blue, the old gentleman sat with a newspaper on his bony knees, talking about the dreadful way in which England had gone to the dogs and the devil.

I think it must have been the advertisements in the newspaper which had made him more than usually garrulous about that subject—all those advertisements of country mansions and estates for sale which, week by week, show the creeping up of poverty to the old aristocracy of England, and their abandonment of the old places in which their family life has been so long rooted, owing to heavy income tax, death duties, cost of living and other hard blows that have hit them as a class since the war.

"We're done," he said. "Our way of life has gone. Well, I'll soon be going myself, thank God! . . . Had a good innings. Don't want to see the roof fall in. England's day is over—old-time England as I knew it and love it. We're all paupers now, pinching and scraping. That damned democracy has swamped us. No distinction of classes. No leisured folk. Everyone grabbing, pushing, struggling for livelihood. Most unpleasant, very distasteful to those of us who were brought up in the old traditions! What's going to happen to our grandsons? Where's their chance? None at all, unless they go into trade. Trade, sir, by Heaven!"

He belonged to a generation and class of Englishman—almost extinct now, I believe—who regarded trade as something mysterious and necessary to the organization of civilized life, but entirely below the dignity and interest of the good old families. For any son of theirs to go into trade was a disgrace. For any daughter to marry a "tradesman" was a shame, to be hidden with other skeletons in the family cupboard under lock and key.

I could not follow the thread of his thought when, after a few moments' silence, while he sat staring ahead across the smoking-room, as though looking far back to that old past of English life, so secure, so comfortable, so full of dignity—for people like himself—he turned to me with an abrupt inquiry:

"D'you ever eat eggs?"

I could not resist a smile, though I disguised it.

"Two for breakfast, sir, like most mortals. Why?"

"Is your wife fond of a chicken now and then?"

"Quite often," I told him. "Though they're generally as tough as leather in the London shops."

He poked my knee with his thin forefinger and chuckled, as though pleased with some secret joke.

"Take my tip. Get 'em from my niece Betty. Cheaper and better, I will say that for the woman."

"It sounds attractive."

"Yes, though I'd hate 'em in this club to know what she's doing. Disgracing the family, sir; dragging down an honoured name. Still, there it is, and I will say her eggs are fresh. My niece, you know—Lady Elizabeth Buckland. Her mother would turn in her grave if she knew."

I inquired the reason for that.

The old man glanced about him, to make sure that our conversation was private.

"She's trading!" he told me, as though he were divulging a horrifying scandal. "Selling butter, eggs, bacon, milk. Takes some of it round herself on one of those new-fangled things called a motor cycle with a side-car. Stuffed with it! Wonder the eggs don't break! I'll be hanged if she didn't call at the club one day and tell the hall porter to fetch me out. Thrust four pounds of bacon into my arms! 'There you are, Nunky!' she said, with the hall porter grinning like a Cheshire cat. 'The best gammon from one of my pedigree pigs, and I'll take the money now, if you don't mind.' 'You're a brazen hussy,' I said. 'You're disgracing me in my own club. You're no better than a gipsy."

"What did she say to that?"

"Laughed!" said the old man angrily, and yet, I thought, with a secret admiration which he tried to hide. "And what d'you think she did, under my very nose, while I stood there fumbling for some money to pay her off quick? Confound me, if she didn't book an order with the hall porter—Higgs, you know; most respectable fellow. Two dozen eggs to be delivered by post each week, and four pounds of butter alternate weeks. . . . I can't hold my head up when I pass him in the hall. Needless to say, he always takes occasion to say her ladyship's eggs are a delight on his breakfast table, or some objectionable familiarity like that!"

The gallant old man, who was touchy in his temper and, like most men of his age, suspicious of ridicule, imagined, I think, that my laughter at his anecdote was directed against himself or his niece. He turned on me sharply, and his eyes glinted like an old cavalry sword.

"Mind you, I'm not saying my niece is a bad woman. She's more courage, sir, than half the men in England. A gallant creature, by God, and doing this work from honourable motives. When her father's will was read, and the solicitor totted up the mortgages, death duties and other charges, I said: 'Well, Betty, my dear, there's another old estate falling into the market. One more house passes from English history. You'll have to sell Buckland Hall.' The solicitor agreed. Cousin Frank agreed. Poor old Buckland's sisters—you know the old frumps?—agreed. But Betty got up in her masterful way—she'd have made a fine cavalryman—and said: 'Be damned to selling the old place!' That's what she said, with a good round 'damn' that shocked the old ladies out of their seats. 'If you think I'm going to haul down the flag just because times are hard in England you don't know my character. If I have to live here alone and dig up my own potatoes, and charge a shilling a-piece to tourists to see the family portraits, I'll keep the old place going, and shame all the slackers who are scuttling like rats because they think the English ship is sinking.' That's what she said, sir! In front of us all, as bold as brass."

"Pretty plucky," I remarked, thinking not of the lady's speech to her relatives, but of her way of keeping up the old house.

"Plucky?"

The old gentleman shifted in his chair and shook with a wheezy laugh.

"That niece of mine has pluck enough to rule England—a dashed sight better than these weak-kneed rascals who are bringing us all to ruin."

I had no time to spare for further conversation, and left the general to take his usual afternoon nap before playing chess with his old crony Izzard, once Commissioner of Lucknow, and now a rather poverty-stricken old man living obscurely in West Kensington.

But I was interested in that information about Lady Elizabeth Buckland. It threw some light on Ronald Verney's withdrawal from poetry to the more practical career of pig-keeping. It also filled in the background, as it were, of a little sketch of her personality which I obtained from a lady I used to love very much as a girl of sixteen, and still admire, poor dear, now that she is a widow with a son and daughter older than she was when I knew her first as a pretty pigtailed thing with big eyes and long legs. . . . Lord, how the years have flown!

I met her again, after an absence of three years, in a quaint little restaurant not more than five hundred yards from Piccadilly Circus, on the Leicester Square side. It was the signboard outside which attracted my notice—a picture of some dainty damsels in puffed petticoats serving a dandy in buckskin breeches and fawn-coloured coat. Above it was written the name

of the restaurant — The Good-natured Ladies.

It was a bright place inside, as I found, with a more homely air than one would expect at a smart restaurant near Piccadilly, though charmingly furnished in the Old English style, with a very good set of Morland prints—originals—round the walls, and some lovely old china. A fragrant place, too, with country flowers on the window-sills and on the little tables. I noticed a fine bunch of Lady Godiva roses on one table, which I selected for my own.

A smart restaurant I called it, and certainly that was true of the company. I'm not much of a society-going man, but I recognized the famous Lady Monica Rankin and her sister. At another table was young Mellish of the Foreign Office, who is very careful of the place in which he eats. There, also, in a corner seat, was old Gaunt of Brockham, so shabby that no one would have guessed that he used to be called "the last of the Dandies" in Victorian days. He was sitting with three young women, who, judging by their black eyes and rather full Stuart-looking lips, were of his own blood and pedigree, with its bend sinister over royal arms.

What aroused my curiosity was the appearance of the waitresses. They were dressed like the damsels on the signboard, with puffed petticoats covered with little sprigs of forget-me-nots, low-cut bodices frilled with a little lace, and short sleeves which left their elbows bare. That costume was not so remarkable as the way they wore it. I mean, they had an unmistakable air of quality, the elegance of women born to the pretty things of life and to the manner which used to be known as "ladylike" before the word went out of fashion when the "flapper" came in. I noticed also a rather comical incident. When one of these waitresses was about to carry a heavy tray to the serving counter old Gaunt, whom I had often seen in the House of Lords droning out one of his portentous speeches, rose hurriedly, thereby upsetting his wine-glass, and carried it for her with old-fashioned courtesy.

"Well done, the old regime!" I thought. But I confess it rather startled me, because in these democratic times not even the most gallant of us are in the habit of waiting on our waitresses.

My next surprise in this restaurant of The Good-natured Ladies was when one of the waitresses approached my table with the menu card, and instead of inquiring what I would eat remarked in a friendly and rather deep-toned voice that it was a "beautiful day, and too good to waste in town."

I knew the voice. It was like an echo from a distant past, bringing remembrances of hayfields where boys and girls, of whom I was one, used to play good games. And I knew the face which was glancing towards the window with a wistful smile because of the dancing sunlight and the flowers on the sill. It was the face of Mary Lyggon, afterwards the wife, and now the widow, of my dear old comrade Jacky Dakers, colonel of the First Royals.

I rose from my seat and touched her arm.

"What are you doing here, Mary, in this fancy dress?"

She opened her eyes wide with surprise and, if I may say so, delight. I noticed that her hair had gone a little grey since I had met her last, three years before, though she still had a youthful look for the mother of two young people.

"I had the sun in my eyes!" she said laughing, as she took my hand. Then she repeated my question. "What am I doing here? Why, earning my living as an honest serving wench."

"But why, in Heaven's name?"

"Why not, in Heaven's name?"

"My dear lady," I said, "as the widow of a British officer and the daughter of a noble family surely you needn't play the Cinderella part like this?"

She pooh-poohed my protest.

"It's better than sitting with my hands in my lap brooding over gay old times in genteel poverty. Living on relations who can't afford to keep one! Languishing among poor old cats in some boarding-house in Bloomsbury! No, thanks! This is a good life with good wages on which I keep my boy and girl at school."

"Good wages!" I said with a kind of groan. "A waitress in a public restaurant! What on earth do your people say?"

She shrugged her shoulders and laughed.

"They're getting reconciled. Aunt Jane was horrified until I told her what good company I keep. A real princess as my sister Cinderella!"

"A princess? Who's that?"

She glanced over at one of the waitresses. It was the girl whose tray old Gaunt of Brockham had carried to the counter.

"Lydia. Prince Suvarov's sister. They escaped from Russia after the Revolution, and starved until Betty rescued them."

"Betty?"

"Yes. Lady Elizabeth Buckland—The Good-natured Lady, our best-beloved. This restaurant was her idea. She started it for women like myself—'distressed gentlewomen,' as we are called by the Charity Organization Society. 'Charity be damned, my dear!' said Betty. She swears abominably when she gets excited. 'I've no patience with forlorn creatures who expect society to feed them because they won't soil their dainty hands and once lived in the lap of luxury. Get some honest work to do and earn a wage like an honest woman. Scrub floors. Clean windows. Grow cabbages. Show all our damned Socialists and the out-of-works, whining for Government doles, that the old quality of England can do their jobs in better style, for longer hours, and with no loss of pride.' That's how Betty talks. It does one good to hear her. She teaches one to laugh again and get the best out of life."

"If someone doesn't introduce me to Lady Elizabeth," I said, "I'll go and beg at her garden gate to get a glimpse of her."

"She'll set her dogs at you," said Mary Dakers. "She hates beggars. But if you ask for work she'll give you a job in the pigstyes or set you to dig in the kitchen garden."

"Like Prince Suvarov and the poet Verney!"

Mary laughed.

"You read that in the picture papers! Betty threatened to horse-whip the next photographer who dared to invade her private grounds."

"She seems a masterful young woman," I remarked.

"Not so young," said Mary, "except in spirit. She's thirty-nine next birthday, and the aunt of a dozen nephews almost as tall as herself."

"Thirty-nine's an attractive age. I believe I'll fall desperately in love with her."

That did not shock Mary in the least, though I am a married man. On the contrary, she took it for granted, but informed me that I should have many rivals. Prince Suvarov worshipped her. Ronald Verney wrote sonnets to her after his work as assistant pig-keeper. Will Bentley, the landscape painter, who had lost his right arm in the war and was down and out until she taught him to pack eggs for the London market, drew her face with his left hand on any bit of paper that came within his reach, and had continual adoration in his eyes. As for young Wintringham—Lord Cecil—who was blinded in both eyes by shell splinters, he went about like a man possessed with a spiritual vision of divine beauty, and was joyful at the sound of her voice or the clump of her big boots down the garden paths where he tended her flowers.

"The clump of her big boots!" I exclaimed. "How dare you destroy

my illusion of that lady's loveliness?"

Mary laughed at my romanticism.

"Betty wears Wellingtons large enough for a grenadier when she's working in the cowsheds or tramping round her farms. She's a man-sized thing, the angel, and I wouldn't like to feel the punch of her right arm. She whacked a gipsy fellow who tried to steal her chickens until he squealed for mercy."

"Lord," I exclaimed, "she's a most alarming woman. I'm not sure that I want to know her after all."

But as a matter of fact, after that luncheon in the restaurant of The Good-natured Ladies, where now I dine quite often, I took particular pains to become acquainted with Lady Elizabeth Buckland, and stayed in a thatched cottage belonging to her on the edge of her estate of Buckland Hall, in Sussex.

It was old General Brandingham who put this opportunity in my way. Chatting with the old fellow one day I told him I wanted to get away from town to write a new novel I had in my head, as well as to give my wife some country air. He thought the first reason ridiculous, and advised me strongly not to write the novel, but if I must keep writing, to produce a monograph on the Roman roads in Britain, by which I might contribute some useful knowledge to my country, instead of pandering to the folly of fiction-reading women. The second reason, however, enlisted his sympathy, and he told me that if I did not mind roughing it a bit, Betty, his niece, had a cottage to let furnished which I could rent at a small sum.

"Write to the woman," he said, "and mention my name. Then offer her half of what she asks. She'll put the price up if she thinks you're easy to bleed. That woman has the financial morality of a City shark."

The old man's habitual abuse of his niece was, I am certain, a mask for an immense admiration of her quality.

In answer to my letter I had a little note from the lady—in a big, powerful handwriting—which amused me a good deal.

"Dear Sir,—I will let you my cottage, The Rosary, for four guineas a week, payable in advance, provided you obtain your eggs, butter, milk, bacon and vegetables from my farm at prices given in enclosed list.

"Yours faithfully,

"Elizabeth Buckland.

"P.S.—I detest your novels."

That reference to my literary work did not lessen my desire to know this lady of whom I had heard so much, and as my wife rather agreed with her verdict there was no offence given or taken, and we accepted the terms without adopting the old general's advice. It was certainly a charming cottage, as we found on our arrival, and was one of the lodge gates of Buckland Hall, at the end of a long avenue of ancient beeches, three hundred years old by the look of them, through which we had a glimpse of an old Tudor mansion with many gables and high, twisted chimneys and latticed windows peering through a tangle of creeper and climbing roses. I knew enough history to remember that it was in this house that Aubrey Earl of Buckland had entertained Queen Elizabeth with a merry Masque written by Ben Jonson, and that a Lady Elizabeth, from whom, no doubt, the present owner was named, had defended this place in the reign of Charles I against one of Cromwell's generals.

My wife and I were exploring the cottage, and I was examining a fine old Jacobean chimney-place in the sitting-room, when we heard some footsteps up the gravel path and the baying of big hounds, and a woman's voice saying, "Down, you devils, down!" Then there was a tap with the little brass knocker at

the open door, and a voice called out: "May I come in?"

It was, of course, Lady Elizabeth Buckland, as we knew at a glance when she came into the sitting-room with two big wolf-hounds, who filled me with alarm, until they sat down, with their tongues lolling out, at a word of command from the lady. She had a big bouquet of flowers in her arms, which she put on the table, telling my wife that she might like them to brighten things up. She also told us that the kitchen chimney smoked "like hell" unless the wood were dry. Then she seemed to remember that she hadn't introduced herself.

"By the by, I'm Elizabeth Buckland, in case you haven't guessed. You'll forgive my muddy boots and dirty hands and generally disreputable appearance?"

Certainly, she was not elegantly dressed. She wore enormous clumping boots—I thought of Mary Dakers' words about them—beneath a skirt which did not reach much below her knees, and a loose, fawn-coloured smock fastened about her waist with a leather belt. On her head was a yellow sun-bonnet, with its strings hanging down. A dairy-maid might have dressed like that and been a little shy of meeting strangers, but Lady Elizabeth Buckland had a style about her that no costume could conceal, a kind of gay and beautiful carelessness. She was tall and big-limbed, with a square but rather boyish-looking face and big brown eyes that were perfectly frank and candid. Somehow I thought of one of Shakespeare's women when I saw her—Katharina in *The Taming of the Shrew*. She was of their ancestry, like many Englishwomen still, I think.

"You look tired!" she told my wife, and insisted on making tea there and then, lighting the fire in the kitchen with her own hands—rather big, masterful hands—though I begged her to let me do it.

"It's not your kind of job," she said. "I doubt whether you've ever lit a fire, or cleaned your own boots, or made your own bed. Writing men are the most parasitical people I know!"

I protested against that as a libel. I had roughed it pretty often in many countries.

"Good enough!" she exclaimed. "That makes me think better of you. I believe in the nobility of labour. If you want to know what honest toil is you come and watch me digging the potato beds."

"I'll help you, if I may," I answered.

She laughed good-humouredly.

"You dig! A man who writes sentimental novels!"

"Not sentimental!" I protested. "Rather tragic and true to life."

"Well, I'll give you a new plot. 'What to do With Our Old Nobility.' 'How the New Poor Went to Work for a Living Wage.' Or, if you want a catchy title, 'Lady Lizzie: Maid of All Work'!"

"Fine idea!" I said. "I'll work it out."

She told me to put her in as the heroine, but warned me against the law of libel.

My wife took to her at once, and I think the admiration was returned. I saw them walking together through the little garden round the cottage while I stayed inside to unpack our bags. They were laughing at some good joke between them, and were like old friends after this short half-hour. The two wolf-hounds, to my great relief, for I felt they had a prejudice against me, followed their mistress close at heel.

She was good enough to ask us to go up to the Hall after supper—I noticed that she did not call it dinner—as she thought we might like to meet her little crowd.

"In what kind of clothes?" asked my wife.

Lady Elizabeth laughed.

"Any old thing! We're a mixed lot. Some of the boys put on dinner jackets, to remind them of old times, and keep the flag flying. They like me to wear a bit of finery now and

then for the same reason. But my Russian prince generally wears a smock, like Tolstoi, and the girls who do the washing-up keep their frocks and frills for nights off."

"Washing-up?" said my wife, rather mystified. Surely there were servants enough to do that at Buckland Hall!

Lady Elizabeth Buckland enlightened her.

"We're all equal up at the house, except that I do the bossing. A sort of Communistic State of indigent aristocrats under the usual tyrant. I'm the tyrant."

She whistled to her ferocious-looking hounds—really they were docile brutes!—and went with a long swinging stride up the garden path and then up the avenue of beeches towards her house.

My wife and I walked that way about nine o'clock that evening. The moon was up and filtered through the overarching branches in their summer foliage, making a lacework pattern on the broad pathway, which, I noticed, was rather weed-grown. Buckland Hall, as we came close to it, looked a noble and romantic place in the moonlight with black shadows flung across its red roofs by the tall twisted chimneys and by its old gables. A lantern was alight above one of the doorways under a stone porch, and we rang a bell which clanged with a deep voice. The door was opened by a tall, handsome, middle-aged man in a white smock, and I recognized at once the Russian refugee, Prince Suvarov, whom I had met a year before on the island of Prinkipo. He bowed and gave me his hand, which felt rough like a labourer's when I clasped it. He bowed again when I introduced him to my wife, and there was a look of homage in his deep-set eyes, as all Russians look in the presence of pretty women.

"Lady Elizabeth is expecting you," he said in perfect English. "We are having a little music after the toil of the day. At least some of us are, though others—Lady Evelyn and Miss Patty, I think—are washing up the supper things, and Lord William is nursing a sick cow."

He led us through a fine old hall, panelled in oak, dark and cracked with age, and hung with trophies of arms and armour, and then up a broad stairway with a curved balustrade, very old and worm-eaten. I noticed that there was tapestry on the walls of the landing upstairs as good as anything I have seen in England, but tattered in places. Prince Suvarov pulled back a heavy curtain over a small door, which he opened.

"Enter, if you please," he said in his formal way.

It was a pleasant and interesting picture that was presented to us in this big room, which I came to know as "the long room." It was lit in an old-fashioned way by candles and oil lamps, which glimmered on the panelled walls and the portraits of ancient folk belonging to Tudor, Stuart and Georgian England in heavy frames of tarnished gilt. A few rugs were on the polished boards, which were as black as ebony, so that they, too, reflected the light above them, and worn by many feet, which had danced here in old games of life now ended.

Lady Elizabeth had put on her "finery," and at first I hardly knew her, so elegant was she—in contrast to that dairy-maid dress of hers—in a white silk gown cut low at the throat. She wore a circlet of pearls on her ruddy-brown hair, giving her a rather queenly look I thought. Only her eyes and her smile greeted us, for she was seated at a rosewood piano accompanying a violin played with a strong touch by a young man who seemed to put all his soul into the melody. It was only after a few minutes that I noticed that he was blind, and with a shock of pity I knew that it was young Wintringham (Lord Cecil) who had suffered this tragedy in the war. In a chair by the fire was a queer, red-headed man, with a long, lean, whimsical

face, wearing a dinner jacket with an empty sleeve. With his left hand, and a notebook on his knee, he was making a portrait sketch of Lady Elizabeth in crayon. That was Will Bentley, the painter, who had lost his right arm in Flanders. Ronald Verney, poet and pig-keeper, was playing chess with a rather pretty girl with "bobbed" hair, and they were so engrossed that young Verney did not notice our arrival nor rise to greet my wife. There were other people in the room—three young men obviously of the officer class, and two rather elderly ladies shabbily dressed. Four other girls came in later—though before the music had stopped—with coffee things and biscuits, and I happened to know one of them was Patty Knight, daughter of that naval commander who sank the German cruiser *Siegfried*, and then was killed in an air-raid over Dover.

"Hallo, Patty!" I whispered.

She nearly dropped a cup and saucer with surprise at seeing me, and then smiled and put her fingers to her lips and glanced at the blind violinist, as though no word could be spoken while his bow was moving.

He was playing a thing by Kreisler—famous now, though I have forgotten its name—and thrilling in its cry of tragedy. When it ended it was Lady Elizabeth who broke the spell of silence that followed it.

"Of course you played it like an angel, Cecil, but for God's sake let's have something a bit more cheerful next time! I like laughing music, not German morbidity."

Young Wintringham laughed, and seemed to see Lady Elizabeth with his sightless eyes.

"Tragic stuff, I admit. But life isn't all laughter, Betty!"

"Let's make it as merry as we can, anyhow, old boy."

"Thanks for your accompaniment," said the blind man, and he stooped and kissed one of her hands.

She gave a little playful tug at his hair and then sprang up and came towards my wife with a very welcoming smile, and I thought of her this time, not as Katharina in *The Taming of the Shrew*, but as Beatrice, Shakespeare's merriest lady.

"We're all in our Sunday best to-night," she said. "It's for your husband's sake. As a novelist he ought to see Buckland in all its splendour. It doesn't look too shabby by candlelight!"

Ronald Verney abandoned the chess-table to greet us, and Patty Knight allowed me to talk to her.

"What's your place in this institution?" I asked her presently, and she told me that she was "tweeny maid"—that is between Lady Evelyn Thorpe and Marjory Laleham—and assistant temporary egg-packer.

"For love or money?" I asked. "What's the system?"

She explained that wages varied with the profits of the estate and the market prices. They were rather at low ebb just now, but Betty had promised them all a "rise" after the harvest if the weather held good.

Prince Suvarov looked a strange figure in his smock and long black boots, but he had a grave dignity and easy grace when later there was a little dance, and Lady Elizabeth gave him the privilege of taking her round the room.

I had the third dance with her—Patty played the piano—and it was then that I was able to get nearer to Lady Elizabeth's philosophy and scheme of life.

"Everyone is merry and bright here," I said, "even poor Wintringham."

"Why not?" she asked. "We work hard, eat well and laugh at what fun we find in life. There's a little love, too, for those who like it. Patty and Lord William—he's nursing a cow to-night—are going to make a match of it, dear turtle-doves!"

"They're all in love with *you*," I said, rather audaciously. "From the prince to the poet."

She laughed, and just a faint touch of colour deepened the warmth of her face.

"That's true, though I'll ask you to remember your manners. Again, why not? It pleases them and doesn't hurt me."

"If you favoured one it would hurt the others. There would be weeping and lamentation."

She gave me a tap on the shoulder and said "Novelist!" with mockery in her smile.

I spoke to her about Mary Dakers and the restaurant of The Good-natured Ladies.

"Why, yes!" she said. "I'm glad you've been there. Tell it to your friends. It's one of my successes, and almost pays its way."

"Only almost?"

"That's the devil of it," said Lady Elizabeth Buckland. "It's the hell of a struggle to get beyond 'almost' to 'quite.' It's the same with Buckland, though the 'almost' is not so good. A tough pull and a hill ahead before I make both ends meet. I'm getting anxious. This abominable climate of ours——"

For a moment there was a serious look in her eyes, but she laughed and called out to Patty at the piano to put a little more spirit into her tune.

"All the same," she said to me, "I'm on the right road. The old quality of England has got to face up to new conditions. That nice old comfortable, leisured and luxurious life of ours has departed—for many of us—with other historical chapters. It's democracy's day out, and the dear damned mob are going to hit us hard and squeeze us out. They've no use for us, and I don't blame 'em, though I dislike their methods."

"How are you going to get even with them?" I asked.

"That's just it," she answered. "We've got to get even with them. Work harder than they do, and rather better. Compete with them in the labour market. Get down to business with more imagination and advanced methods. Abandon snobbishness and use our hands or our brains as God has made them."

She held out her big hand to me as we danced, and seemed proud of it.

"A good working hand, eh? Agricultural ancestors, hunting and fighting folk, made that fist of mine."

"You've got the brains as well," I told her.

"Not brains," she said, "but character. I believe in blood still. It *does* count! If they can forget old traditions, Early Victorian humbug, and stop grousing about high taxation and the loss of luxury, the old quality of England will come out on top. They did pretty well in the war—died in the right way, didn't they?"

She glanced round the room at her "retainers," as they would have been called in feudal times.

"This little crowd," she said, and then laughed.

"Why do you laugh?" I asked.

"They were all down and out," she told me, "before I came to their rescue and gave them honest work to do. Young Wintringham was talking of suicide, poor lad, till I helped him to see out of his blind eyes. Will Bentley, having lost his right arm, and the knack of painting bad landscapes, was sponging on a poor aunt and borrowing half-crowns from old pals. And the girls—good God!—what a lot of 'em there are in England eating their hearts out in idleness and bemoaning the downfall of their fathers' fortunes! If only they would get a job—even if it were no better than cleaning windows or scrubbing floors! That's why I started the restaurant of The Good-natured Ladies. That's why I'm running an employment agency for out-of-work ladies—they *will* cling to the ridiculous word!—in High Street, Kensington. That's why I've turned Buckland into a home farm and market garden. I'm teaching the new poor how to earn a living wage!"

"It's a great idea!" I said with enthusiasm. "A noble scheme!"

She looked at me with her shrewd, candid, courageous eyes.

"Thoroughly selfish too," she remarked. "My spirit clings to the old house. It's crawling with the ghosts of my blood. I'm getting cheap labour to keep it going! . . . Even then it's damned expensive as a bit of sentiment."

The dance ended, and that was the last conversation I had that night with Lady Elizabeth Buckland, but enough to make me one of her devotees, with my wife's approval and agreement. I liked her pluck, her gaiety, her candour, the Elizabethan spirit which lived in her again.

It was at the end of my dance with her that a new-comer appeared in the room, and I fancied that his presence was resented by the other men, and especially by Prince Suvarov and Ronald Verney, my poet friend. Yet he was a good-looking and pleasant-looking fellow, rather shabbily dressed in a pair of baggy grey trousers and a sports coat with big pockets like an officer's tunic. He had a big, ruddy face, clean-shaven, of a naval type I thought, which was a good guess, because Patty Knight told me he had been a petty officer on one of the cruisers in the Battle of Jutland.

I noticed that he spoke with a slight Sussex burr in his speech, and that his hands were rough and had broken nails, and that his eyes were shy as well as blue.

Lady Elizabeth seemed delighted to see him.

"It's splendid of you to come! I'm burning to talk to you about the price of hops and that new feed I've got for the cattle—and a dozen other things I want to ask you!"

"I'll tell you all I know, my lady," he answered with a nervous but pleasant-sounding laugh, and I saw that he was embarrassed among these people in dinner jackets and in the presence of Lady Elizabeth Buckland in her silk gown. A wave of colour deepened his ruddy skin, and his blue eyes looked down at his big boots as though ashamed of their clumsiness. He was the only man in the room who addressed his hostess as "my lady." Most of the men called her Betty, except Prince Suvarov, to whom she was Lady Elizabeth.

She took him by the hand in her impulsive way and led him to a seat by the great chimney-place, where I heard her talking to him about the mysteries of agriculture and market prices.

"Who's the blue-eyed bloke?" I asked Patty Knight, and she told me that it was Richard Leigh who kept a little inn, The Wheatsheaf, in Buckland village.

"He's Betty's chief adviser on manures, cattle food, pig-breeding and farm produce. He was brought up as a farmer before he went to sea. There's nothing he doesn't know about that kind of thing. Betty knew him when they were boy and girl. He taught her most of what she knows about birds, and butterflies, and beasties, which is quite a lot."

"Sussex of the old school," I thought, looking at this country fellow sitting rather stiffly beside Lady Elizabeth and saying, "Yes, my lady" and "No, my lady," as shy as a schoolboy, though a man of thirty-five or so.

My wife and I did not stay longer that evening, and Ronald Verney walked back with us to the cottage as an escort.

"Lady Elizabeth is wonderful!" said my wife, as we walked down the avenue of beeches, startling some rabbits who had come out in the moonlight.

"We all think so," said young Verney with a little thrill in his voice. The boy, I could see, worshipped the lady, and his pig-keeping was a good excuse to serve and be near her. When he turned at our cottage gate and went back towards the house we saw him standing a little while in the milky radiance beyond the beech trees, as

though enchanted with the beauty of this summer night.

During those weeks in which we dwelt in the thatched cottage my wife saw more than I did of Betty Buckland, as she came to call her, for I had my novel to write, and became engrossed in it. My wife, finding me in this state—the most unsociable that human nature knows—was glad to help in Lady Elizabeth's gardens and to spend her evenings (while I scribbled) up at the Hall several nights a week, with Ronald Verney, or Suvarov, or Will Bentley, as her escort down the long avenue.

So it was from my wife, rather than from personal observation, that I gained further light upon the character of Lady Elizabeth and the comedy (with a touch of tragedy) in the life up at that old house.

There was no doubt, from what my wife told me, that Betty Buckland had a considerable temper when vexed, in spite of her just claim to the title of "The Good-natured Lady." She could not abide laziness, and there was a lively scene between her and Will Bentley (with my wife as witness, to her great embarrassment) because he had a habit of lying late in bed and taking things uncommonly easy in working hours in the hothouses, where he looked after the flowers and grapes which were sold in the London market.

He came strolling down at eleven o'clock one morning, with his empty sleeve swinging and a pipe in his left hand.

"Morning, ma'am!" he said to Lady Elizabeth.

She went for him like Queen Bess when Essex was impudent.

"What the devil d'you mean by beginning work at this time? Look here, Will, unless you're game to put in an honest day's work for a living wage you'd better clear out. I don't keep a sanatorium for ex-officers suffering from inertia. I expect honour and honesty in return for board and fair pay."

My wife said that poor Will Bentley was like a beaten dog at her anger. He stammered out feeble excuses in an abject way, and there were even tears in his eyes, of wounded pride, and wounded love. Lady Elizabeth flamed with anger at him, and would hear no excuse. She used language which was very shocking to my wife, but then suddenly calmed down at the sight of Will's extreme distress and said: "I'll forgive you this time, Will. But do play the game by me!"

She held out her hand in token of forgiveness, and Will Bentley dropped his pipe and kissed her hand.

"I'll play the game—to the death—dear lady," he said in a low voice, which my wife thought very thrilling.

There was also something of a scene, though not so violent, with Suvarov.

The Russian prince said something, it seemed, about Richard Leigh, the owner of The Wheatsheaf, who had come up to give some advice about a disease that was attacking the Buff Orpingtons. My wife did not hear what words the Russian muttered in a sulky way when Leigh strode off, but Lady Elizabeth turned upon him so angrily that she was quite pale.

"Because you're a tuppenny-ha'-penny prince," she said, "that gives you no right to insult a friend of mine."

Suvarov breathed hard, my wife said, and repeated the words "two-penny-halfpenny prince!" as though they stuck in his throat. Then he said something about drowning himself in the lake as the best thing for a foreign pauper in a cold-hearted country.

That absurdity of his, uttered in a tragic tone, dispelled the lady's temper. She laughed in her frank, deep-voiced way.

"Don't be a damn fool, Suvarov! You know I love you."

"As you would a dog," said Suvarov with his Russian gloom.

"As I do my wolf-hounds," she agreed gaily, "and even a little more when you're not sulky."

It was from my wife, also, that I heard, with real regret, that a financial crisis was approaching this adventure at Buckland. The harvest looked like being a failure owing to the heavy rain which had beaten down the crops, and they had bad luck with the cattle—six of the cows had died and others were sick. Betty hinted to my wife that, so far from making both ends meet, she was facing a heavy deficit. She would have to "haul down the flag"—that was her phrase—unless she could think of another way of keeping things going.

"She's dreadfully worried about it," said my wife. "It will break her heart if she has to sell the old home, after all, and turn off all these friends of hers."

"I'll back her to pull through," I said. "She's got the brain of an Empire-builder and the pluck of a Derby winner."

My wife laughed.

"Well, she's thinking out a new scheme. But that's a secret."

"Even to me?"

Even to me, it seemed, for my wife refused to give a hint about it.

The first hint I had was from Will Bentley, the one-armed landscape painter, who had, I thought, abandoned painting. But it seemed that he had returned to his former profession, for I discovered him one day in a white overall in one of the greenhouses (where I was trying to find my wife), putting the finishing touches to some heraldic device on a big board, about six feet by four.

It was a shield with three lions *passant gardant* surmounted by a coronet.

"That's a noble bit of work," I said. "What's the idea of it?"

I thought he seemed a little embarrassed, and short in his answer. He stood deliberately between me and the board.

"It amuses me," he said. "As you may have seen, it is a coat of arms."

"Lady Elizabeth's?" I asked.

"Fine day, isn't it?" he answered, and I took the hint.

There was certainly something in the wind, as it were, affecting the fortunes of Betty Buckland's adventure, and the people she had gathered round her. The lady departed for London one day, and after her return, a week later, there was a look of amused excitement in her eyes, reflected in the expression of Ronald Verney, Will Bentley, and others. For some days afterwards, as I saw on one or two visits, there was unusual and peculiar activity inside the house. The furniture was being shifted from one room to another. Old curtains were being taken down, and replaced by new ones which Lady Elizabeth had ordered from town. There was a campaign of dusting, cleaning, painting, polishing, in which my wife took a hand.

"What is it all about?" I asked, with pardonable curiosity.

"It's Betty's new scheme to keep the flag flying," said my wife, smiling. "The secret will be out soon, so keep patient!"

I confess I was rather annoyed at being left out in the cold like this, but I had a little private revenge by discovering another secret which I think was mine alone. A strange and romantic secret, which, I confess, rather thrilled me.

I ought not to have known. It was not meant for my ears, and my only defence is that I did not deliberately play the eavesdropper or Peeping Tom. It happened that I was taking a stroll after a hard morning's work in a little thicket bordering the lake at the far end of the Buckland estate. A path wound through it, and lured my footsteps—and I was thinking of a character in my novel (I had reached a crisis!) —when I heard Lady Elizabeth's voice speaking very clearly on the other side of a big oak tree where, as I knew, there was a rustic seat.

"It's up to you, Dick. I'm yours, if you'll take me, and we'll carry

out the work together. Your head and my heart!"

A man's voice answered, deep-toned.

"Oh, my lady! My dear lady!"

It was the voice of Richard Leigh, publican at the Wheatsheaf, and sometime petty officer.

I caught one glimpse of them, sitting hand in hand—or rather, with Lady Elizabeth clasping the big brown hand of a shy, simple man.

I kept that secret to myself, rather afraid of it. It was so big, so alarming, that it rather put me off my own plot in the novel I was writing!

The other secret was revealed to me and to the general public one morning that week. I was strolling up from Buckland village, when I saw Will Bentley and three or four young fellows who worked about the farm putting up a big signboard. It was Will Bentley's heraldic device, and above it in gold letters:

"THE BUCKLAND HOTEL."

Four or five villagers were staring at it open-mouthed and goggle-eyed. It was the most astonishing thing in the eight hundred years' history of Buckland.

Lady Elizabeth herself came to look at it. She was in her working clothes with her two wolf-hounds, as I had seen her first. She laughed in an excited way as the board was hoisted up, and its brilliant colours flamed out in the midday sun.

"Splendid!" she cried. "Now for a publicity campaign! We'll fill the house with paying guests, and keep the old flag flying."

Remarkable woman! I was sorry to leave her cottage a week or two later when the newspapers were filled with paragraphs about this famous mansion, turned into a hotel under the direction of its lady owner—the beautiful Lady Elizabeth Buckland.

The end of the story, so far as it has an end, was told to me by General Brandingham, from whom I had heard the beginning of it, in our London club.

"That amazing niece of mine," he said, "she's utterly disgraced our name. Deliberately dragged it down to the very mud."

"In what way?" I asked, smiling at him.

"Turned Buckland Hall into a public-house. By heaven, sir, a common pub. Incredible! And there's worse to come—the last blow at our old pride."

He lowered his voice, and waited until a waiter had passed.

"They tell me she's going to marry a low-bred fellow in the village. A tavern-keeper!"

"Richard Leigh—and an honest type of Englishman," I told him, and he was astonished at my knowledge.

Before I left him that afternoon, he put a number of papers in my hand, rather furtively.

They were illustrated circulars of the Buckland Arms Hotel, describing its beauty as a week-end resort for motorists, golfers, fishermen, and those who loved an old English mansion with lovely gardens and noble trees. "Directed by Lady Elizabeth Buckland and a staff of assistants."

"Show 'em to your friends," said the old man. "I want to do my best for the woman. But don't drag my name into it!"

My wife and I decided to spend a week-end there, but in answer to my wife's note, Betty Buckland sent a letter saying that all the rooms were taken, for four weeks ahead.

"It's quite like old times in the Hall," she wrote. "The New Poor are rallying up, and I charge them less than the New Rich, because of their loyalty. As head butler, Suvarov is a gem, and Will Bentley is great as a social entertainer. *We're paying our way now and making a profit!* So I get married in November to Richard Leigh of the Wheatsheaf, which is going out of business. Come and throw a shoe at me, and occupy the haunted room. No extra charge!"

PHILIP GIBBS.

TALES OF THE LONG BOW

By G. K. Chesterton

" 'If my learned brother will allow me,' said Hood, in his forensic manner, 'would he describe the fact of a little girl walking on two legs as alarming ?'
" 'A little girl is always alarming,' replied Pierce."

IV.—THE ELUSIVE COMPANION OF PARSON WHITE

IN the scriptures and the chronicles of the League of the Long Bow, or fellowship of foolish persons doing impossible things, it is recorded that Owen Hood, the lawyer, and his friend Crane, the retired Colonel, were partaking one afternoon of a sort of picnic on the river-island that had been the first scene of a certain romantic incident in the life of the former, the burden of reading about which has fallen upon other readers in other days. Suffice it to say that the island had been devoted by Mr. Hood to his hobby of angling, and that the meal then in progress was a somewhat early interruption of the same leisurely pursuit. The two old cronies had a third companion, who, though considerably younger, was not only a companion but a friend. He was a light-haired, lively young man, with rather a wild eye, known by the name of Pierce, whose wedding to the daughter of the innkeeper of the Blue Boar the others had only recently attended.

He was an aviator and given to many other forms of skylarking. The two older men had eccentric tastes of their own; but there is always a difference between the eccentricity of an elderly man who defies the world and the enthusiasm of a younger man who hopes to alter it. The old gentleman may be willing, in a sense, to stand on his head; but he does not hope, as the boy does, to stand the world on its head. With a young man like Hilary Pierce it was the world itself that was to be turned upside-down; and that was a game at which his more grizzled companions could only look on, as at a child they loved playing with a big coloured balloon.

Perhaps it was this sense of a division by time, altering the tone, though not the fact, of friendship, which sent the mind of one of the older men back to the memory of an older friend. He remembered he had had a letter that morning from the only contemporary of his who could fitly have made a fourth to their party. Owen Hood drew the letter from his pocket with a smile that wrinkled his long, humorous, cadaverous face.

"By the way, I forgot to tell you," he said, "I had a letter from White yesterday."

The bronzed visage of the Colonel was also seamed with the external signs of a soundless chuckle.

"Read it yet?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the lawyer; "the hieroglyphic was attacked with fresh vigour after breakfast this morning, and the clouds and mysteries of yesterday's laborious hours seemed to be rolled away. Some portions of the cuneiform still await an expert

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translation; but the sentences themselves appear to be in the original English."

"Very original English," snorted Colonel Crane.

"Yes, our friend is an original character," replied Hood. "Vanity tempts me to hint that he is our friend because he has an original taste in friends. That habit of his of putting the pronoun on the first page and the noun on the next has brightened many winter evenings for me. You haven't met our friend White, have you?" he added to Pierce. "That is a shock that still threatens you."

"Why, what's the matter with him?" inquired Pierce.

"Nothing," observed Crane in his more staccato style. "Has a taste for starting a letter with 'Yours Truly' and ending it with 'Dear Sir'; that's all."

"I should rather like to hear that letter," observed the young man.

"So you shall," answered Hood, "there's nothing confidential in it; and if there were you wouldn't find it out merely by reading it. The Rev. Wilding White, called by some of his critics 'Wild White,' is one of those country parsons, to be found in corners of the English countryside, of whom their old college friends usually think in order to wonder what the devil their parishioners think of them. As a matter of fact, my dear Hilary, he was rather like you when he was your age; and what in the world you would be like as a vicar in the Church of England, aged fifty, might at first stagger the imagination; but the problem might be solved by supposing you would be like him. But I only hope you will have a more lucid style in letter writing. The old boy is always in such a state of excitement about something that it comes out anyhow."

It has been said elsewhere that these tales are, in some sense, of necessity told tail-foremost, and certainly the letter of the Rev. Wilding White was a document suited to such a scheme of narrative. It was written in what had once been a good hand-writing of the bolder sort, but which had degenerated through excessive energy and haste into an illegible scrawl. It appeared to run as follows:

"'My dear Owen,—My mind is quite made up; though I know the sort of legal long-winded things you will say against it; I know especially one thing a leathery old lawyer like you is bound to say; but as a matter of fact even you can't say it in a case like this, because the timber came from the other end of the county and had nothing whatever to do with him or any of his flunkeys and sycophants. Besides, I did it all myself with a little assistance I'll tell you about later; and even in these days I should be surprised to hear *that* sort of assistance could be anything but a man's own affair. I defy you and all your parchments to maintain that *it* comes under the Game Laws. You won't mind me talking like this; I know jolly well you'd think you were acting as a friend; but I think the time has come to speak plainly.'"

"Quite right," said the Colonel.

"Yes," said young Pierce, with a rather vague expression, "I'm glad he feels that the time has come to speak plainly."

"Quite so," observed the lawyer dryly; "he continues as follows":

"'I've got a lot to tell you about the new arrangement, which works much better even than I hoped. I was afraid at first it would really be an encumbrance, as you know it's always supposed to be. But there are more things, and all the rest of it, and God fulfils himself, and so on and so on. It gives one quite a weird Asiatic feeling sometimes.'"

"Yes," said the Colonel, "it does."

"What does?" asked Pierce, sitting up suddenly, like one who can bear no more.

"You are not used to the epistolary method," said Hood indulgently; "you haven't got into the swing of the style. It goes on":

"'Of course, he's a big pot down here, and all sorts of skunks are afraid of him and pretend to boycott me. Nobody could expect anything else of those pineapple people, but I confess I was surprised at Parkinson. Sally of course is as sound as ever; but she goes to Scotland a good deal and you can't blame her. Sometimes I'm left pretty severely alone, but I'm not down-hearted; you'll probably laugh if I tell you that Snowdrop is really a very intelligent companion.'"

"I confess I am long past laughter," said Hilary Pierce sadly; "but I rather wish I knew who Snowdrop is."

"Child, I suppose," said the Colonel shortly.

"Yes; I suppose it must be a child," said Pierce. "Has he any children?"

"No," said the Colonel. "Bachelor."

"They say he was in love with a lady in those parts and never married in consequence," said Hood. "It would be quite on the lines of fiction and film-drama if Snowdrop were the daughter of the lady, when she had married Another. But there seems to be something more about Snowdrop, that little sunbeam in the house:

"'Snowdrop tries to enter into our ways, as they always do; but, of course, it would be a little awkward if she played tricks. How alarmed they would all be if she took it into her head to walk about on two legs, like everybody else.'"

"Nonsense!" ejaculated Colonel Crane. "Can't be a child—talking about it walking about on two legs."

"After all," said Pierce thoughtfully, "a little girl does walk about on two legs."

"Bit startling if she walked about on three," said Crane.

"If my learned brother will allow me," said Hood, in his forensic manner, "would he describe the fact of a little girl walking on two legs as alarming?"

"A little girl is always alarming," replied Pierce.

"I've come to the conclusion myself," went on Hood, "that Snowdrop must be a pony. It seems a likely enough name for a pony. I thought at first it was a dog or a cat, but alarming seems a strong word even for a dog or a cat sitting up to beg. But a pony on its hind legs might be a little alarming, especially when you're riding it. Only I can't fit this view in with the next sentence: 'I've taught her to reach down the things I want.'"

"Lord!" cried Pierce. "It's a monkey!"

"That," replied Hood, "had occurred to me as possibly explaining the weird Asiatic atmosphere. But a monkey on two legs is even less unusual than a dog on two legs. Moreover, the reference to Asiatic mystery seems really to refer to something else and not to any animal at all. For he ends up by saying: 'I feel now as if my mind were moving in much larger and more ancient spaces of time or eternity; and as if what I thought at first was an oriental atmosphere was only an atmosphere of the orient in the sense of dayspring and the dawn. It has nothing to do with the stagnant occultism of decayed Indian cults; it is something that unites a real innocence with the immensities, a power as of the mountains with the purity of snow. This vision does not violate my own religion, but rather reinforces it; but I cannot help feeling that I have larger views. I hope in two senses to preach liberty in these parts. So I may live to falsify the proverb after all.'

"That," added Hood, folding up the letter, "is the only sentence in the whole thing that conveys any-

thing to my mind. As it happens, we have all three of us lived to falsify proverbs."

Hilary Pierce had risen to his feet with the restless action that went best with his alert figure. "Yes," he said; "I suppose we can all three of us say we have lived for adventures, or had some curious ones anyhow. And to tell you the truth, the adventure feeling has come on me very strong this very minute. I've got the detective fever about that parson of yours. I should like to get at the meaning of that letter, as if it were a cipher about buried treasure."

Then he added more gravely: "And if, as I gather, your clerical friend is really a friend worth having, I do seriously advise you to keep an eye on him just now. Writing letters upside-down is all very well, and I shouldn't be alarmed about that. Lots of people think they've explained things in previous letters they never wrote. I don't think it matters who Snowdrop is, or what sort of children or animals he chooses to be fond of. That's all being eccentric in the good old English fashion, like poetical tinkers and mad squires. You're both of you eccentric in that sort of way, and it's one of the things I like about you. But just because I naturally knock about more among the new people, I see something of the new eccentricities. And believe me, they're not half so nice as the old ones. I'm a student of scientific aviation, which is a new thing itself, and I like it. But there's a sort of spiritual aviation that I don't like at all."

"Sorry," observed Crane. "Really no notion of what you're talking about."

"Of course you haven't," answered Pierce with engaging candour; "that's another thing I like about you. But I don't like the way your clerical friend talks about new visions and larger religions and light and liberty from the East. I've heard a good many people talk like that, and they were mountebanks or the dupes of mountebanks. And I'll tell you another thing. It's a long shot even with the long bow we used to talk about. It's a pretty wild guess even in this rather wild business. But I have a creepy sort of feeling that if you went down to his house and private parlour to see Snowdrop, you'd be surprised at what you saw."

"What should we see?" asked the Colonel, staring.

"You'd see nothing at all," replied the young man.

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean," replied Pierce, "that you'd find Mr. White talking to somebody who didn't seem to be there."

Hilary Pierce, fired by his detective fever, made a good many more inquiries about the Rev. Wilding White, both of his two old friends and elsewhere.

One long legal conversation with Owen Hood did indeed put him in possession of the legal outline of certain matters, which might be said to throw a light on some parts of the strange letter, and which might in time even be made to throw a light on the rest. White was the vicar of a parish lying deep in the western parts of Somersetshire, where the principal landowner was a certain Lord Artington. And in this case there had been a quarrel between the squire and the parson, of a more revolutionary sort than is common in the case of parsons. The clergyman intensely resented that irony or anomaly which has caused so much discontent among tenants in Ireland and throughout the world; the fact that improvements or constructive work actually done by the tenant only passes into the possession of the landlord. He had considerably improved a house that he himself rented from the squire, but in some kind of crisis of defiance or renunciation, he had quitted this more official residence bag and baggage, and built himself

a sort of wooden lodge or bungalow on a small hill or mound that rose amid woods on the extreme edge of the same grounds. This quarrel about the claim of the tenant to his own work was evidently the meaning of certain phrases in the letter—such as the timber coming from the other end of the county, the sort of work being a man's own affair, and the general allusion to somebody's flunkeys or sycophants who attempted to boycott the discontented tenant. But it was not quite clear whether the allusions to a new arrangement, and how it worked, referred to the bungalow or to the other and more elusive mystery of the presence of Snowdrop.

One phrase in the letter he found to have been repeated in many places and to many persons without becoming altogether clear in the process. It was the sentence that ran: "I was afraid at first it would really be an encumbrance, as you know it's always supposed to be." Both Colonel Crane and Owen Hood, and also several other persons whom he met later in his investigations, were agreed in saying that Mr. White had used some expression indicating that he had entangled himself with something troublesome or at least useless; something that he did not want. None of them could remember the exact words he had used; but all could state in general terms that it referred to some sort of negative nuisance or barren responsibility. This could hardly refer to Snowdrop, of whom he always wrote in terms of tenderness as if she were a baby or a kitten. It seemed hard to believe it could refer to the house he had built entirely to suit himself. It seemed as if there must be some third thing in his muddled existence, which loomed vaguely in the background through the vapour of his confused correspondence.

Colonel Crane snapped his fingers with a mild irritation in trying to recall a trifle. "He said it was a—you know, I've forgotten the word—a botheration or embarrassment. But then he's always in a state of botheration and embarrassment. I didn't tell you, by the way, that I had a letter from him too. Came the day after I heard yours. Shorter, and perhaps a little plainer." And he handed the letter to Hood, who read it out slowly:

"'I never knew the old British populace, here in Avalon itself, could be so broken down by squires and sneaking lawyers. Nobody dared help me move my house again; said it was illegal and they were afraid of the police. But Snowdrop helped, and we carted it all away in two or three journeys; took it right clean off the old fool's land altogether this time. I fancy the old fool will have to admit there are things in this world he wasn't prepared to believe in.'"

"But look here," began Hood as if impulsively, and then stopped and spoke more slowly and carefully. "I don't understand this; I think it's extremely odd. I don't mean odd for an ordinary person, but odd for an odd person; odd for this odd person. I know White better than either of you can, and I can tell you that, though he tells a tale anyhow, the tale is always true. He's rather precise and pedantic when you do come to the facts; these litigious quarrelsome people often are. He would do extraordinary things, but he wouldn't make them out more extraordinary than they were. I mean he's the sort of man who might break all the squire's windows, but he wouldn't say he'd broken six when he'd broken five. I've always found when I'd got to the meaning of those mad letters that it was quite true. But how can this be true? How could Snowdrop, whatever she is, have moved a whole house, or old White either?"

"I suppose you know what I think," said Pierce. "I told you that Snowdrop, whatever else she is,

is invisible. I'm certain your friend has gone Spiritualist, and Snowdrop is the name of a spirit, or a control, or whatever they call it. The spirit would say, of course, that it was mere child's play to throw the house from one end of the county to the other. But if this unfortunate gentleman believes himself to have been thrown, house and all, in that fashion, I'm very much afraid he's begun really to suffer from delusions."

The faces of the two older men looked suddenly much older, perhaps for the first time they looked old. The young man seeing their dolorous expression was warmed and fired to speak quickly.

"Look here," he said hastily, "I'll go down there myself and find out what I can for you. I'll go this afternoon."

"Train journey takes ages," said the Colonel, shaking his head. "Other end of nowhere. Told me yourself you had an appointment at the Air Ministry to-morrow."

"Be there in no time," replied Pierce cheerfully. "I'll fly down."

And there was something in the lightness and youth of his vanishing gesture that seemed really like Icarus spurning the earth, the first man to mount upon wings.

Perhaps this literally flying figure shone the more vividly in their memories because, when they saw it again, it was in a subtle sense changed. When the other two next saw Hilary Pierce on the steps of the Air Ministry, they were conscious that his manner was a little quieter, but his wild eye rather wilder than usual. They adjourned to a neighbouring restaurant and talked of trivialities while luncheon was served; but the Colonel, who was a keen observer, was sure that Pierce had suffered some sort of shock, or at least some sort of check. While they were considering what to say Pierce himself said abruptly, staring at a mustard-pot on the table:

"What do you think about spirits?"

"Never touch 'em," said the Colonel. "Sound port never hurt anybody."

"I mean the other sort," said Pierce. "Things like ghosts and all that."

"I don't know," said Owen Hood. "The Greek for it is agnosticism. The Latin for it is ignorance. But have you really been dealing with ghosts and spirits down at poor White's parsonage?"

"I don't know," said Pierce gravely.

"You don't mean you really think you saw something!" cried Hood sharply.

"There goes the agnostic!" said Pierce with a rather weary smile. "The minute the agnostic hears a bit of real agnosticism he shrieks out that it's superstition. I say I don't know whether it was a spirit. I also say I don't know what the devil else it was if it wasn't. In plain words, I went down to that place convinced that poor White had got some sort of delusions. Now I wonder whether it's I that have got the delusions."

He paused a moment and then went on in a more collected manner:

"But I'd better tell you all about it. To begin with, I don't admit it as an explanation, but it's only fair to allow for it as a fact—that all that part of the world seems to be full of that sort of thing. You know how the glamour of Glastonbury lies over all that land and the lost tomb of King Arthur and time when he shall return and the prophesies of Merlin and all the rest. To begin with, the village they call Ponder's End ought to be called World's End; it gives one the impression of being somewhere west of the sunset. And then the parsonage is quite a long way west of the parish, in large neglected grounds fading into pathless woods and hills; I mean the old empty rectory that our wild friend has evacuated. It stood there a cold empty shell of flat classical architecture, as hollow as one of those classical temples they used to stick

up in country seats. But White must have done some sort of parish work there, for I found a great big empty shed in the grounds—that sort of thing that's used for a schoolroom or drill-hall or what not. But not a sign of him or his work can be seen there now. I've said it's a long way west of the village that you come at last to the old house. Well, it's a long way west of that that you come to the new house—if you come to it at all. As for me, I came and I came not, as in some old riddle of Merlin, as you shall hear.

"I had come down about sunset in a meadow near Ponder's End, and I did the rest of the journey on foot, for I wanted to see things in detail. This was already difficult as it was growing dusk, and I began to fear I should find nothing of importance before nightfall. I had asked a question or two of the villagers about the vicar and his new self-made vicarage. They were very reticent about the former, but I gathered that the latter stood at the extreme edge of his original grounds on a hill rising out of a thicket of wood. In the increasing darkness it was difficult to find the place, but I came on it at last, in a place where a fringe of forest ran along under the low brows of a line of rugged cliffs, such as sometimes break the curves of great downlands. I seemed to be descending a thickly wooded slope, with a sea of tree-tops below me, and out of that sea, like an island, rose the dome of the isolated hill; and I could faintly see the building on it, darker against the dark-clouded sky. For a moment a faint line of light from the masked moon showed me a little more of its shape, which seemed singularly simple and airy in its design. Against that pallid gleam stood four strong columns, with the bulk of building apparently lifted above them; but it produced a queer impression, as if this Christian priest had built for his final home a heathen temple of the winds. As I leaned forward, peering at it, I overbalanced myself and slid rapidly down the steep thicket into the darkest entrails of the wood. From there I could see nothing of the pillared house or temple or whatever it was on the hill; the thick woods had swallowed me up literally like a sea, and I groped for what must have been nearly half an hour amid tangled roots and low branches, in that double darkness of night and shadow, before I found my feet slipping on the opposite slope and began to climb the hill on the top of which the temple stood. It was very difficult climbing of course, through a network of briars and branching trees, and it was some little time afterwards that I burst through the last screen of foliage and came out upon the bare hill-top.

"Yes; upon the bare hill-top. Rank grasses grew on it, and the wind blew them about like hair on a head; but for any trace of anything else, that green dome was as bare as a skull. There was no sign or shadow of the building I had seen there a little time before; it had vanished like a fairy palace. A broad track broken through the woods seemed to lead up to it, so far as I could make out in that obscurity; but there was no trace of the building to which it led. And when I saw that, I gave up. Something told me I should find out no more; perhaps I had some shaken sense that there were things past finding out. I retraced my steps, descending the hill as best I might; but when I was again swallowed up in that leafy sea, something happened that, for an instant, turned me cold as stone. An unearthly noise, like long hooting laughter, rang out in vast volume over the forest and rose to the stars. It was no noise to which I could put a name; it was certainly no noise I had ever heard before; it bore some sort of resemblance to the neighing of a horse immensely magnified; yet it might have been half human, and there was triumph in it and derision.

"I will tell you one more thing I learnt before I left those parts. I left them at once, partly because I really had an appointment early this morning, as I told you; partly also, I think, because I felt you had the right to know at once what sort of things were to be faced. I was alarmed when I thought your friend was tormented with imaginary bogies; I am not less alarmed if he had got mixed up with real ones. Anyhow, before I left that village I had told one man what I had seen, and he told me he had seen it also. But he had seen it actually moving, in dusk turning to dark; the whole great house, with its high columns, moving across the fields like a great ship sailing on land."

Owen Hood sat up suddenly, with awakened eyes, and struck the table.

"Look here," he cried, with a new ring in his voice, "we must all go down to Ponder's End and bring this business to a finish."

"Do you think you will bring it to a finish?" asked Pierce gloomily; "or can you tell what sort of a finish?"

"Yes," replied Hood resolutely. "I think I can finish it, and I think I know what the finish will be. The truth is, my friend, I think I understand the whole thing now. And as I told you before, Wilding White, so far from being deluded by imaginary bogies, is a gentleman very exact in his statements. In this matter he has been very exact. That has been the whole mystery about him—that he has been very much too exact."

"What on earth do you mean by that?" asked Pierce.

"I mean," said the lawyer, "that I have suddenly remembered the phrase he used. It was very exact; it was dull, deadly, literal truth. But I can be exact, too, at times, and just now I should like to look at a time-table."

They found the village of Ponder's End in a condition as comically incongruous as could well be with the mystical experiences of Mr. Hilary Pierce. When we talk of such places as sleepy, we forget that they are very wide-awake about their own affairs, and especially on their own festive occasions. Piccadilly Circus looks much the same on Christmas Day or any other; but the market-place of a country town or village looks very different on the day of a fair or a bazaar. And Hilary Pierce, who had first come down there to find in a wood at midnight the riddle that he thought worthy of Merlin, came down the second time to find himself plunged suddenly into the middle of the bustling bathos of a jumble sale. It was one of those bazaars to provide bargains for the poor, at which all sorts of odds and ends are sold off. But it was treated as a sort of fête, and highly coloured posters and handbills announced its nature on every side. The bustle seemed to be dominated by a tall dark lady of distinguished appearance, whom Owen Hood, rather to the surprise of his companions, hailed as an old acquaintance and managed to draw aside for a private talk. She had appeared to have her hands full at the bazaar; nevertheless, her talk with Hood was rather a long one. Pierce only heard the last words of it:

"Oh, he promised he was bringing something for the sale. I assure you he always keeps his word."

All Hood said when he rejoined his companion was: "That's the lady White was going to marry. I think I know now why things went wrong, and I hope they may go right. But there seems to be another bother. You see that clump of clod-hopping policemen over there, inspector and all. It seems they're waiting for White. Say he's broken the law in taking his house off the land, and that he has always eluded them. I hope there won't be a scene when he turns up."

If this was Mr. Hood's hope, it was ill-founded and destined to dis-

appointment. A scene was but a faint description of what was in store for that hopeful gentleman. Within ten minutes the greater part of the company were in a world in which the sun and moon seemed to have turned topsy-turvy and the last limit of unlikelihood had been reached. Pierce had imagined he was very near that limit of the imagination when he groped after the vanishing temple in the dark forest. But nothing he had seen in that darkness and solitude was so fantastic as what he saw next in broad daylight and in a crowd.

At one extreme edge of the crowd there was a sudden movement—a wave of recoil and wordless cries. The next moment it had swept like a wind over the whole populace, and hundreds of faces were turned in one direction—in the direction of the road that descended by a gradual slope towards the woods that fringed the vicarage grounds. Out of those woods at the foot of the hill had emerged something that might from its size have been a large light grey omnibus, but it was not an omnibus. It scaled the slope so swiftly, in great strides, that it became instantly self-evident what it was. It was an elephant, whose monstrous form was moulded in grey and silver in the sunlight, and on whose back sat very erect a vigorous middle-aged gentleman in black clerical attire, with blanched hair and a rather fierce aquiline profile that glanced proudly to left and right.

The police inspector managed to make one step forward, and then stood like a statue. The vicar, on his vast steed, sailed into the middle of the market-place as serenely as if he had been the master of a familiar circus. He pointed in triumph to one of the red and blue posters on the wall, which bore the traditional title of "White Elephant Sale."

"You see I've kept my word," he said to the lady in a loud, cheerful voice. "I've brought a white elephant."

The next moment he had waved his hand hilariously in another direction, having caught sight of Hood and Crane in the crowd.

"Splendid of you to come!" he called out. "Only you were in the secret. I told you I'd got a white elephant."

"So he did," said Hood; "only it never occurred to us that the elephant was an elephant and not a metaphor. So that's what he meant by Asiatic atmosphere and snow and mountains. And that's what the big shed was really for."

"Look here," said the inspector, recovering from his astonishment and breaking in on these felicitations. "I don't understand all these games, but it's my business to ask a few questions. Sorry to say it, sir, but you've ignored our notifications and evaded our attempts to——"

"Have I?" inquired Mr. White brightly. "Have I really evaded you? Well, well, perhaps I have. An elephant is such a standing temptation to evasion, to evanescence, to fading away like a dewdrop. Like a snowdrop perhaps would be more appropriate. Come on, Snowdrop."

The last word came smartly, and he gave a smart smack to the huge head of the pachyderm. Before the inspector could move or anyone had realized what had happened, the whole huge bulk had pitched forward with a plunge like a cataract and went in great whirling strides, the crowd scattering before it. The police had not come provided for elephants, which are rare in those parts. Even if they had overtaken it on bicycles they would have found it difficult to climb it on bicycles. Even if they had had revolvers they had omitted to conceal about their persons anything in the way of big-game rifles. The white monster vanished rapidly up the long white road, so rapidly that when it dwindled to a small object and disappeared, people could hardly believe that such a prodigy had ever been present, or that their eyes had

not been momentarily bewitched. Only, as it disappeared in the distance, Pierce heard once more the high nasal trumpeting noise which, in the eclipse of night, had seemed to fill the forest with fear.

At a subsequent meeting in London Crane and Pierce heard with considerable relief from the lawyer that his legal dexterity had succeeded in extricating the Rev. Wilding White from his trouble with the local police.

"Not that I suppose that will be the end of his quarrels with the squire," he said, "because he is rather of the quarrelling sort."

"It's not his quarrels but his friendships that remain rather a mystery," said Pierce. "How did he manage to make friends with a white elephant? Rather an eccentric business, wasn't it?"

"Rather eccentric to make friends with us," said the Colonel. "We are a set of white elephants."

"As a matter of fact," said the lawyer, "this particular last prank of the parson arose out of the last prank of our friend Pierce."

"Me!" said Pierce in surprise. "Have I been producing elephants without knowing it?"

"Yes," replied Hood. "You remember when you were smuggling pigs in defiance of the regulations, you indulged (I regret to say) in a deception of putting them in cages and pretending you were travelling with a menagerie of dangerous animals. The consequence was, you remember, that the authorities forbade menageries as well. Our friend White took up the case of a travelling circus being stopped in his town as a case of gross oppression, and when they had to break it up he took over the elephant."

"Sort of small payment for his services, I suppose," said Crane. "Curious idea, taking a tip in the form of an elephant."

"He might not have done it if he'd known what it involved," said Hood. "As I say, he was a quarrelsome fellow with all his good points, and he quarrelled with that dark lady you saw when they were going to be married after all these years; but I suppose it'll be all right now the point happily is cleared up."

"What point?" asked the young man.

"The point about Snowdrop," answered Hood. "There was a misunderstanding. We thought of a pony, and a monkey, and a good many things that Snowdrop might be. But we never thought of the interpretation which was the first to occur to the lady."

There was a silence, and then Pierce said in a musing manner: "It's odd it should be the sequel of my little pig adventure. A sort of reversal of the *parturiunt montes;* I put in a little pig and it brought forth an elephant."

"It will bring forth more monsters yet," said Owen Hood. "We have not seen all the sequels of your adventures as a swineherd."

But touching the other monsters or monstrous events so produced the reader has already been warned—nay, threatened—that they are involved in the narrative called the "Exclusive Luxury of Enoch Oates," and for the moment the threat must hang like thunder in the air.

G. K. Chesterton.

GOING BACK TO SCHOOL

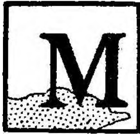
No boy or girl should be sent back to school without a copy of LITTLE FOLKS, the Magazine for Boys and Girls. September Number now on sale. Price 1/-.

LONG COMPLETE NOVEL

Miguel the Liberator

By Herbert Gale

"The cortege drove on as the *vigilantes* hastened through the shivering crowd to the spot where the explosion had occurred. None noticed Miguel as he slipped inconspicuously down from his lamp-post. None, that is, save one—a girl in white on a flower-decked balcony."



MIGUEL'S father held him high on his shoulder to watch the Liberator come ashore up the dazzling steps of the mole.

"Observe him — the man who has given us freedom!" Miguel's father said, and then whipped off his faded black hat and waved it enthusiastically. Maybe it was the loud-voiced cheering of Miguel's father that caused the Liberator to glance in his direction and smile; but Miguel himself intercepted that smile and felt warm about the heart.

Sebastian De Pedroba did more than smile; he reached out a white-gloved hand over the heads of the front rank of spectators—he was a tall man, and the average run of Estrellians are short of stature though not lacking in courage when it comes to fighting—and patted Miguel on the cheek.

"Now, there's a brave fellow," he said, with one eye on the clustered newspaper reporters. "That's the spirit that has made Estrellia free!"

Miguel did not quite understand it, though in a vague, puzzled way he realized that to be noticed by Estrellia's new president was an honour. At all events, his father bore him from *posada* to *posada*, drinking much of the raw country wine at the cost of admirers.

"Some day," he said to the daughter of the proprietor of the Dos Hermanos, who had taken charge of him when his father fell asleep over the wine-splashed table, "some day I, too, will be a liberator." And Felice Castroma laughed.

"Thou—a liberator! Think again, little one. Liberators must be tall and straight and handsome. And thou——!"

Even at that early age Miguel knew that he was not quite as were other boys of his years. To walk was a difficulty; to run, an impossibility. Why he should have been different from other boys he could not quite understand, not knowing that on the day prior to his birth his mother had dashed to the heads of panic-stricken mules and brought them up before they crashed over the five-hundred-foot cliff to destruction on the jagged rocks below, where the sea broke fretfully, thus saving the life of Miguel's father, who had met many generous friends in the city that day.

"I shall grow out of this," said Miguel dauntlessly, indicating his crookedness. "And the president touched me on the cheek. He made me his own man. *Dios!* and the sun shone on his uniform!" He rubbed his eyes as though they were still dazzled with all that splendour, and Felice stooped to kiss the puckered face.

There had been another revolution in Estrellia. Folks had grown weary of Pablo Annunciato's misgovernment; and when the truth leaked out that he was using the taxes that pressed so hardly on the *obreros* for his own personal pleasures, there was really nothing in the way of alternative save protest in the South American way. Sebastian De Pedroba promised justice; he had friends occupying high positions in the navy; consequently, after the revolutionary troops had entered the city under cover of the navy's guns and suspended Pablo Annunciato from the presidential flagstaff, all that remained was for Sebastian to make his triumphal landing.

Miguel thought of the splendour of the Liberator until he fell asleep. Later, he was gathered up in Felice's capable arms and deposited amongst the straw in his father's wagon, and contrived to

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reach his home in some miraculous fashion. When he hobbled out next morning from the adobe hut that was all the home he knew, to descend the zig-zag path leading down to the crisp and chuckling waters for his customary morning swim, he saw the grim sea-castles moored off the city with their great guns still trained shorewards, and remembered the talk he had overheard in the Dos Hermanos.

"If I may not be a liberator," he said, shouting the words to the laughing morning breeze, "I might at the least be captain of such a ship as one of those."

Ambition takes root curiously; it is bred in inexplicable fashions. Hitherto, until the new president had patted his cheek, Miguel's greatest ambition had been to be another such reckless muleteer as his father. But now things were changed. It seemed to him that nothing would satisfy him but that he should, at an appointed time, command one of the great ships lying out there. He stripped himself of his ragged clothing and entered the water. On land he was clumsy, an object of derision; in the water he was like a fish. He swam out to the nearer of the anchored ships and quickened his strokes as a choked cry split the morning air.

"There is nothing to fear," he told the clutching, cramp-stricken man who clasped embarrassing arms about his neck. "Come, trust to me—Miguel." The helpless and very scared swimmer only clung the tighter, whereupon Miguel struck him dexterously under the jaw and ridded him of immediate consciousness.

Miguel turned his salvage on his back and got beneath him; then, swimming with the smooth ease of a seal, he contrived to bear him alongside the great, grey-walled ship. It chanced that the crippled bather was not a sailor of the lower deck, but a cadet, a member of one of Estrellia's best families.

"Give an eye to that dwarf," said the *Minas Guerriras'* captain. "He has saved the life of Emmanuelo Cervijas." But by the time he spoke Miguel was already half-way to the shore. The battleship's cutter overtook him as he dived deeply down through the pellucid water to harvest a chunk of coal that had been spilled overboard from a shoreward-bound lighter.

"Stay; do not interfere. This coal will sell at a price," the boy gasped as the boat-hook gripped about his neck.

"Little fool—there will be a reward for saving the young officer!" grunted the cutter's bowman. "So, come inboard! Our captain desires speech with thee." They wrapped him in a sailor's jumper ere they conveyed him to the quarterdeck. The battleship's captain shrugged his shoulders after a single glance at the twisted body.

"He is no use for *us*," he said. "But take him below and give him food." Miguel was conveyed to the mess-deck and there regaled on succulent dishes. Above his head, as he ate, the great guns thundered their approval of the recent victory. Precisely at eight o'clock that morning the new revolutionary colours were hoisted by the fleet and saluted in accordance with custom. Miguel, neglected in the rush of ceremonial, liked the colour and noise. Something thrilled within him like an electric current. But he remembered, even in the midst of the crash and glory of it all—even when the gaudy bits of bunting went high above the giant battleship's masts and the eight hundred men of the ship's crew stood rigidly to attention—that he had omitted to milk the family goat that morning. That was one of his duties and had been practically ever since he could walk. Consequently he ridded himself of the borrowed jumper and unostentatiously slid overboard under the muzzles of the thunderous guns. No one missed him particularly at that moment, all right-thinking men being too busily engaged in shouting plaudits in favour of the new Liberator.

Miguel went ashore and recovered his ragged garments from the rock-cleft where he had bestowed them. He climbed the cliff and milked the goat; but in fancy he performed no such menial duty. His imagination was troubling him even more than usual; but he was not quite sure whether he intended to be a liberator, clad in cloth of gold, or a battleship's captain. And he was still dubious when the handsome carriage drew up at the unkempt entrance to his father's hut and deposited a gracious, white-haired woman, an upright, grizzled man and a girl on the sunbaked mud of the cart-road.

Miguel decided there and then that the girl—who was little more than a child—was the most beautiful thing his eyes had ever rested upon. Maybe she was somewhere about his own age, though, as Estrellian girls achieve womanhood early, she gave a suggestion

of years and wisdom. He was so eager to open the ramshackle gate that divided his father's parched and untidy garden from the cart-road that his foot slipped on a loose stone and he came to earth with stunning force. It was the girl who lifted him and who, seeing blood ooze from the graze on his forehead, applied soft and healing lips to the wound.

"Maria!" protested the mother; and she herself made that too-familiar sign by way of averting the evil eye. "Come, he is a peon's child!"

"But he is hurt; see, he bleeds!" the girl said. "So, then, little one—it will soon be well."

"Nay," Miguel said stoutly; "it is immediately well, senorita. Your smile has healed it."

"Oh, la, la!" said the elder lady. "The grotesque is already a courtier! So, then, we seek a youth of the name of Miguel Segunza." Miguel's mother, arriving at the hut's door, curtsied at sight of the quality and projected a pointing finger.

"That is Miguel," she said; "but he is a good boy; he has done no wrong." It was characteristic of the lad that he had made no mention of his services in saving the drowning cadet.

"That? Why, that is a child, and a dwarf child at that!" protested Senora Cervijas. "We seek a stout youth who saved our son from death."

"It was but a touch of the cramp," Miguel explained somewhat sheepishly.

"What hast thou done?" demanded his mother, still nervous. For Roderiguez Segunza not infrequently got into trouble with the authorities by reason of his uncurbed daring; and many a time had officials visited the adobe hut on the point that overlooked the lovely harbour. Such visits usually meant the temporary absence of Roderiguez and lean days for those he left behind him.

"I did nothing," stammered Miguel the twisted. "One could not let a man drown: and I did not know he was a cadet."

Senor Cervijas took the matter in hand. "So far as one may understand, your son, my good woman, saved the life of my son, who is a cadet in the naval service. Now, as this was our only son, we desire to express our gratitude and talk of a reward."

"What—a reward for saving a life?" said Miguel, who had saved a number and said nothing whatsoever about it. He looked from Senor Cervijas's face to that of his daughter. She was obviously of the ruling caste, delicate and rich-seeming. "Why, in the water I am as a fish. It is only on land that I am clumsy."

"But, for God's love, come within!" said the mother, scenting largess. "The heat of the sun—*ay de mi!* Come within, then." She hospitably ushered them into the living-room, chasing out a few chickens, two mangy curs and the goat's kid. From the adjoining chamber the stertorous snores of Miguel's father sounded alarmingly. Somehow Miguel found himself alongside Maria Cervijas.

"It is nothing; no harm will come, senorita," he comforted her. But, curiously enough, he realized that he was slightly ashamed of his father at that particular juncture. Until now he had been inordinately proud of the muleteer, who could throw a knife with a skill that made him feared above his kind, and who was inevitably called upon to perform difficult tasks when other muleteers of weaker breed pronounced them impossible.

"It is that wastrel of a husband of mine—a sign of God's discontent with me," Miguel's mother explained, producing thick, clouded glasses and a flask of the raw country wine. "So! and the little cakes, which are none so bad as might be."

Even to-day Senora Segunza was a personable woman; maybe it was from her her son had inherited his beauty of feature. Senor Cervijas drained his glass to the brightness of her eyes and endeavoured to control the writhing of his face at the wine's appalling sourness.

"Your son, madam," he declared, "is a hero! I am disposed to be grateful." He reached out an arm and caught Miguel about the shoulders. "Come, youngster, tell me what I may do for you to show my gratitude," he said.

"I wish to be a liberator!" Miguel said uncertainly. "A liberator, with gold on my sleeves and the bands playing."

"Ay, many of us have wished that, *muchacho*. But only once in every so often is a genius born. And if it be not possible to become a liberator, what then?"

"I will be captain of a great ship with guns."

"In the navy, Miguel, they demand that all shall be straight and strong," said Senor Cervijas pityingly. And

Senora Cervijas, too keenly occupied with social advancement for the most part to have time to spare for pity, furtively brushed away a tear.

"But I shall grow straight and strong," Miguel protested sturdily. "Look you, it is only on land that I am clumsy; in the water I can outswim all the others. Now, to be a sailor one must know the tricks of the sea."

"Well, we will see. Maybe it can be done—we must be patient. With the new president, who knows?" muttered Senor Cervijas. But, scrutinizing Miguel, he knew the worthlessness of promises. For the boy was dwarfed and misshapen; and straight, clean-muscled youths strove together for admission to the navy.

Maria, being a child only, and a victim of impulses, laid a slim arm about Miguel's neck when the moment of leave-taking came. Furthermore, notwithstanding her mother's expression of disapproval, she kissed Miguel on the lips. Even so might she have caressed a misshapen puppy.

"Some day, that girl-child shall be my wife—when I am a liberator!" Miguel said sturdily after the visitors were gone.

"Foolish boy—remember thy station!" said his mother. "They are the great ones, those. We are *poveros*—dirt beneath their feet. Maybe they will secure thee a position in a Government office, with a pension at the end of honest service."

"That one whom I saved from drowning—their son, no? He was also a great one; but he could not swim. In the sea he was not greater—I was better than he."

There were many thoughts working in Miguel's mind, but he found it difficult to interpret them. One thing stood out clearly—two things, rather. The new Liberator had started life as a cattle-boy on one of the inland *estancias;* the girl-child who had kissed Miguel was very beautiful—beautiful enough to become the ultimate bride of a liberator. Therefore, Miguel decided that when the appointed time was ripe he himself must become a liberator.

The boy was informed that, on account of his deformity rendering him ineligible for the naval service, it had been decided to offer him an opportunity of studying the craft of a pilot, where the restrictions were not so meticulous. But since, at his age, he was too young to join up with that somewhat conservative fraternity, it was advisable that he should go to school and study assiduously during the intervening years. The requisite fees were paid, to the dissatisfaction of Roderiguez Segunza, who considered that he should have had the handling of such moneys as rewarded his son's gallantry; and to school Miguel went. It was not a pleasurable experience. His tutors expressed satisfaction with his mental attainments, certainly. They seemed to think that when the soiled linen of his brain was picked over and laundered he might display genuine intelligence. He was bright, quick to reach solutions of problems over which straighter boys than himself puzzled and wept. But those school-companions, who counted success at games of infinitely more worth than scholastic attainments, treated him scurvily. Miguel could not keep pace with them; too, he was only the son of a drunken muleteer, and consequently an outcast.

None the less, in one or two of the boyish sports Miguel displayed a certain amount of dexterity. At swimming, of course, he was easily first. In the water he need not depend on his bowed and shambling legs; and he who was outdistanced ashore could swim in circles round the stoutest of his schoolfellows. Also—an inheritance from his dissolute father, no doubt—he had the trick of throwing a knife. Not only was his accuracy of aim remarkable, but also his swiftness in drawing the weapon and making up his mind at which target to throw. Not that knife-throwing was considered one of the recognized arts at his school: it was a peon's trick, the boy was told, unbefitting one who was permitted to associate with the sons of *cavalleros*. This was told him by Gonzales Del Starto, who affected to be a pretty fencer with foils and a deadly pistol shot.

"One acts according to his lights," Miguel said. He gave evidence of his proficiency a little later. On a broiling midsummer day the class drowsed over its tasks; Father Malstorma, surfeited with a heavy lunch, slept without attempt at concealment, his fat hands linked upon his capacious abdomen. The drone of mosquitoes sounded heavily in the air. Gonzales Del Starto, with a penholder, illustrated new thrusts and feints for the benefit of a worshipping group of fellow-students. Miguel pored over his grammar. He was absorbed in

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a whirl of entirely ridiculous dreams: he saw himself as the captain of a noble battleship, with the sun glinting on the gold epaulettes of his uniform, defeating a horde of clamorous rebels, and ultimately—the change in uniform was not perceptible—going ashore amid a hurrahing throng to receive adulation as his country's liberator. And—the noonday heat made for somnolence—a very beautiful girl strewed flowers before his triumphant advance—a girl who resembled Maria Cervijas in every detail save that she was a little older.

This girl, halting in a golden glory of sunlight, suddenly laid her slim hands on the dream-liberator's shoulders and, stooping—because of that liberator's deformity—pressed a kiss on his lips and acclaimed him as a hero and her accepted lover.

Miguel wakened suddenly with a long-drawn sigh of sheer ecstasy, thinking it was the dream-kiss that had aroused him. But in a moment he realized that it was the indrawn hiss of many breaths that had fetched him from slumber. He blinked and stared about him. As usual, the much-hacked desks were tenanted, each place holding its pupil; but the careless chatter had ceased. Gonzales Del Starto made futile passes with his pen at the thin air, but made them furtively. Father Malstorma, awakened, stared affrightedly before him, not venturing to move, afraid even to breathe. His fat, comely face was white and drawn. Coiled about one of the upright pillars of his chair-back was a diamond snake, the most deadly reptile known to all South America. Its neck was swollen and vibrant, its evil, hooded head was drawn back in act to strike. A single movement on the good father's part must have precipitated the attack of the cruel fangs. No man lived longer than it took him to emit his death-wail when once those fangs struck home. Miguel knew that; he also knew that a sound or a motion on the part of the father meant the forward dart of that malignant head.

"Silence!" he hissed sibilantly, and reached for his pocket. He discovered his big knife—an ugly tool better befitting the son of a muleteer than a pupil at that select academy—and took it by the point. The head of the diamond snake was swaying sideways. Occasionally its protruding fangs seemed almost to brush the father's cheek; but at the fullest extent of its sideways swing that head was not more than two inches distant from the human flesh.

"Be still, father!" said Miguel softly, and in the throbbing silence his voice could plainly be heard. Then he threw the knife. It decapitated the snake neatly, flung its head to the floor, splashed the father's face with black blood. The danger was over; the chatter broke forth afresh.

"Nay; it was nothing," Miguel said to the complimentary father. "But a sword could not have done that trick."

When he was aged sixteen, very powerful as to chest and arms and a better swimmer than Estrellia had ever known, he was removed from the school and apprenticed to the pilot service. It was, to say the least of it, an arduous existence, the bug-haunted, leaky pilot cutter keeping the sea in all weathers. Being the youngest aboard, all the slavery fell to his lot, but he did not complain. Although he was twisted and unlike the others, he had a feeling that he was of some account in the national scheme of things. For instance, the great, imposing battleships were as blundering and bewildered children when entering the harbour unless a pilot from the cutter were in control. Even the glittering captains and officers, brave in gold lace and important with clanking swords, took second place as soon as the hard-bitten pilot from the cutter threw his leg over the side. Miguel, as an apprentice, was told off to take soundings—the harbour bottom was everlastingly shifting—and to call them to the lordly chief pilot who controlled the big ships' destinies. He was turning from a cast aboard the big white English liner one morning when he found himself looking full into the face of Maria Cervijas. She had grown, he realized, into a woman. And she was more beautiful even than his wildest fancies had painted her. She had donned her latest Parisian frock in order to do adequate honour to the home-coming; and Miguel was acutely conscious of his own sea-stained garments.

"By the mark, ten!" he chanted automatically, before he had time to recover from his bewilderment. Maria smiled and extended a gracious, white-gloved hand.

"You are the one who saved my brother!" she said. "And, see, my brother approaches."

It was true. A snowy launch had detached itself from the moored battle-

ship and was hastening across the sun-kissed water to the inward-bound liner. Miguel stared, not at the launch but at Maria, and his heart beat strangely fast. By contrast even with the other women who crowded to the *Rio Tinto's* rail she was superb.

"I am newly returned from Europe, where my father insisted that my education should be completed," the girl said. "But I remembered you—oh, yes!"

"By my hump?" asked Miguel, speaking bitterly.

"No; by your face," the girl countered. "It is a good face. And in a twisted body a heart of pure gold might be." Miguel found no vocal answer to that, but his heart seemed to be singing a glad and very wonderful tune. He wanted to say something about his vague dreaming, but before he could find words the *Rio Tinto's* engines were slowed to allow the naval launch to come alongside, and young Cervijas, ensign of the *Santa Catrina*, came jauntily aboard. He embraced his sister with youthful fervour; he greeted other important passengers who were not above friendship with the son of the Minister of the Interior; but when the salutations were over, Maria, dimpling, led him to where Miguel stood aloof in the aproned seclusion of the lead-platform.

"Here is one who saved you, Emmanuelo," she said, "when you were near death." Young Cervijas studied the warped figure in its sea-soiled clothing. The senior pilot on the liner's bridge bent over the weather-cloth to shout a reprimand to Miguel for not mentioning the altering soundings, and he spoke fully and without reserve, so that his biting recriminations caused more than one face to flush.

"By the mark, seven!" cried Miguel. Emmanuelo Cervijas reached into his pocket and produced a five-dollar note.

"Here, pilot," he said superbly, "I had forgotten, but now I remember. Buy thyself a bottle of wine." He turned away, taking his sister's arm. Miguel restrained an impulse to fling the note into its donor's face. He told himself that the five-dollar bill was an overpayment for such small services as he had been able to render. It was borne in upon him that his dreams were futile, that he was of a caste different from these splendid beings who moved dazzlingly across his horizons.

But, when the bitterness was at its greatest, Maria Cervijas detached herself from a group and, moving swiftly to the rail, touched Miguel on the bare arm.

"Here," she said. "Here, I thought of you in Europe. Here is a relic that was blessed by his Holiness the Pope; and I brought it to you in hope that it might make you as others are!"

With her own hands she bestowed the relic about Miguel's neck. Then the *Rio Tinto* dropped her anchor and the bustle of disembarkation began. Miguel bestowed the five-dollar note on a boat-boy, but carefully concealed the sacred relic in the bosom of his shirt.

But the relic failed in its effect. The years dragged by and Miguel was still the distorted travesty of a man he had always been. None the less, those who were his associates admitted that he possessed a brain and a courage. Not often did he see Maria Cervijas, for his work kept him constantly afloat; but his mental eye saw her incessantly. And that brain of his ordered him to lead a seemly life, to study, to fit himself for some coming ordeal that should prove him a man in the whole world's sight. He remembered her when, as a child, she had lifted him and kissed his hurt. He remembered her as she placed the relic about his neck. But chiefly he thought of her as bride of Estrellia's future liberator. For, deformity or no deformity, Miguel had not lost his ambition. True, being a fourth-class pilot hardly seemed to lead to such exalted distinction; and—having paid for the advice with his scanty earnings—he had learnt from an eminent surgeon that there was no hope on earth of his twisted body becoming fair and straight; consequently, it was really impossible to hope; but—he did hope. Occasionally, by way of keeping his ambitions alive when they seemed like to perish in the stifling closeness of the pilot cutter's atmosphere, he donned his shore-going raiment and went ashore to hear the talk in the cafés and learn how the run of public opinion went.

There was no need now to visit the adobe hut on the cliff top at the harbour entrance. His father, the muleteer, was dead, his skull smashed by a bottle in a tavern brawl; his mother, by virtue of her comeliness, was married again, to a respectable citizen whose principal idea in life it was to forget her association with the muleteering crowd. A small step-brother, comely beyond the ordinary, usurped Miguel's place in his mother's affection.

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Consequently there was nothing to interfere with Miguel's thoughts. And when he saw Sebastian De Pedroba presiding at some solemn state function, a blaze of gold and glory, those thoughts naturally trended in one direction. It was ridiculous. It was even grotesque and pathetic; but there the ambition was—a survival of boyhood's years. Sebastian De Pedroba had lifted Estrellia from a sink of iniquity and false dealing and had restored it to prosperity. His presidency had been marked by countless improvements in the lot of the commoner folk; and Miguel, regardless of laughter and sneers, intended that he, too, at some date to be fixed by God and the saints, would also benefit Estrellia to the extent of ruling it wisely and well.

In the waterside cafés, however, he heard mutterings. De Pedroba was all very well, men said, but he was behind the times. It was true he had caused the children of peons to be educated and slums to be destroyed; but he had made enemies for himself. That was inevitable. De Pedroba's chiefest enemies were amongst the clerical element, who saw, in enlightenment, education and resolute progress, the premonition of their ultimate fall from power.

"Look you, he has run his course," one loud-voiced demagogue informed Miguel, who sat with a modest glass of wine before him. "You *marineros*, eh—you know nothing. But in a little while there will be a horde of so-called educated ones clamouring for your jobs. You, a hunchback, what chance would you have, when straight, strong, young men demand work?"

"It is the priests who put those words into your mouth," Miguel retorted steadily. "Have a care with your thumping, *amigo*. You'll spill my wine!"

"Like that?" The liquid slopped over on to the table. The table-thumper snapped his fingers in Miguel's face. "Do what you like, hunchback!" he rasped. "See; I drink your wine!"

"Yes, that is like the priests and their slaves," said Miguel, his hand at his belt. He could have pierced the demagogue's Adam's apple with a single gesture. "Put fear into a man—fill him with dread of the life to come: threaten him with hell's fire if he protest; and then—drink his wine! But his Excellency is too strong for the likes of you, big mouth; he is seated on the hearts of the common folk such as I."

"For that I am minded to flatten thee, like a fly!" roared the agitator. But the others of the café's habitués had somewhat to say in that matter. Miguel, quiet-spoken and self-effacing as he was, had earned their approval. It was known that, though young, he was a skilled pilot; that a considerable part of his by no means munificent earnings went unostentatiously to the relief of distress along the water-front. The agitator was pitched into a corner from which he arose snarling, his hand to his knife haft. Miguel's knife deftly cut away one end of his moustache before it stuck, quivering, in the wall.

"I could as easily have pierced thy right eye!" said Miguel, hobbling along to recover the weapon.

"Might be, might be!" the demagogue fumed. "But wait—oh, wait! When certain of us are raised to power, as will come, let such as you, in the Government service, look to yourselves!" Then the agitator was unceremoniously pitched out of the café into the street, and there were not wanting men who were eager to refill Miguel's glass.

"None the less he is dangerous, that one, speaking amongst the ignorant," the café-keeper said, puffing a little by reason of recent exertions. "He will do nothing himself, look you; but he will incite others. He is paid by the priests. But he'll never stand up to a man's face—providing he be a man. A stab in the back is Carlo's *forte*. Watch thy steps, Miguel, when night falls and the *vigilantes* are busy elsewhere!"

"It is said," observed another of the café's clients, "that his Excellency meditates marriage. In the interests of the country, no?" There was a burst of laughter at that remark.

One man's hand wagged at the wrist. "He is a wise man, the president, if he marries this Senorita Maria Cervijas," he said. Miguel felt a queer, cold stiffening of the blood in his veins.

"The Senorita Cervijas?" he repeated through frozen lips.

"Ay; so the gossip runs. Cervijas is a powerful man with a following; and many of them amongst the Church gang. Well, what happens if his Excellency marries the daughter—a handsome wench, as I can testify, and a clever one, moreover, having been educated in Europe? The president binds Cervijas' friends to him with strong bonds."

"But she is a child!" Miguel protested. "And his Excellency——"

Miguel the Liberator

"A young bloom looks younger and more beautiful in the eyes of an elderly man," snuffled the gossip through his nose. "And straws show the way of the wind. Her brother, now, that was ensign in the *Minas Guerriras*, is suddenly promoted out of his turn to command the new fast destroyer *Sierra Blanca*. What can that mean but one thing? If you'd win the favour of the woman, be generous to her family! I'll wager that within a month the news is abroad that his Excellency weds the Senorita Cervijas." Miguel felt as if a heavy weight had dropped on him from a considerable height. He was stunned. It was only then that he realized he loved Maria Cervijas; not with the selfless devotion of a worshipper for a saint, as he had hitherto supposed, but as a full-blooded man loves the one woman of his life.

"Ay, that's gospel!" laughed another of the gathering. "If the president lives so long, let it be understood. But the Church gang, now, they'll see to it that he doesn't live much longer! How it will happen I know not. By poison, likely, since Holy Church prefers to work in secret and in the dark; by poison or by bomb. But they'll not stand by and see this marriage brought to a head, unless I'm vastly mistaken."

Miguel got to his feet and stumbled from the café. It seemed to him that all the world was going out in crashing thunders about him. He had much to trouble his thoughts, but those thoughts refused to run smoothly. It was as though something of the warp of his body had got into his brain. Chiefly, however, the ominous fact that the woman of his worship could never be his rose uppermost. Now it stood to reason that an earthly angel such as Maria Cervijas would never marry a man whom she did not love. Miguel, hobbling awkwardly up the Calle de Mayo, caught sight of his reflection in a full-length mirror outside one of the imposing stores.

"Oh, fool!" he said with a half-sob. "Is it likely she'd think twice of such a deformity as thou?"

But, deep as was his despondency, he found it possible to go on hoping when once he was back aboard the pilot cutter. For at sea, on the unsteady deck of the little craft, he seemed less helpless and of more importance than when ashore.

His Excellency the President of Estrellia, superb in uniform, drove to the Senate House. Miguel Segunza, third-class pilot, watched his dazzling progress from the lamp-post that he had climbed with the agility of a monkey. Many noticed Sebastian De Pedroba; none had eyes for Miguel. Even the man in the doorway of the little church, the man whose broad-brimmed hat was pulled down over his eyes, failed to notice Miguel; but the hunchback noticed him.

"Our friend of the large mouth!" Miguel thought, and remembered how he had cut the fellow's moustache-tip away with a single knife-throw. From his altitude, above the heads of the vivacious crowd, Miguel could see quite plainly. He could see, for instance, the head of the procession appear in view at the bend of the noble avenue which led to the Senate House. He could see white plumes dancing above the head-dresses of the escort; the plumes behind them that nodded on the horses' heads as the presidential carriage swung into sight. He could distinguish the sparkle of the noontime sun on gold lace, and he was reminded of the vanished past when he had been held aloft on his father's shoulder to delight in that sparkling splendour.

The city was making *fiesta* to-day. The pilot cutter had moored to the quay that such of her complement as were not required for duty might share in the rejoicings. A new law was about to be passed, and the talk was that the president himself had been instrumental in bringing that law into being. It was a direct blow at the waning power of the Church that desired to keep men in a state approaching serfdom in order that its own magnificence might be exalted. A good law, though, so ran the gossip in the pilot cutter's messroom: one that would cause even the most down-trodden of men to walk uprightly. The dignitaries of the Church were furious, needless to say, as they saw power slipping from their hold before the onrush of the wave of intelligence and common sense.

Miguel stared out over the sea of heads, stared to where a balcony, overhanging the avenue, held feminine figures, and his keen eyes distinguished one of those figures very clearly. That would be Maria Cervijas, of course, present there to watch the triumph of the man whom gossip named her accredited lover. Miguel swallowed hard and turned his gaze away because of the gnawing pain that troubled his inward part.

And in the turning his glance focused on that big-mouthed table-thumper standing there in the doorway of the little church. The door behind him was opened, a shaven head projected. Miguel, with eyes trained by much watching of the leading marks of the harbour, noticed a whispered consultation, saw the wide-hatted man nod, as it were understandingly—saw more, a something passed furtively from hand to hand.

"There's one will bear watching," Miguel thought. The shaven head disappeared. The door closed. The head of the procession was drawing near. Cheering rolled along the massed throng like the rumble of guns—such guns as had fired the salute at De Pedroba's accession to the presidential chair. And yet, by some twist of the brain, Miguel was not thinking of that long-ago day at all; he was thinking, instead, of that episode in the waterside café when that wide-throated boaster had talked of coming changes, when others had named him a coward who would stab in the back or—throw a bomb!

"Ah!" muttered Miguel Segunza. "Ah! a bomb! That would explain much." He measured his distance with an infallible eye. He reached for the weighty knife that he invariably carried and loosened it in its sheath. He might be mistaken; very probably he was mistaken; but it was as well to be prepared.

The presidential carriage was now almost abreast of the lamp-post to which Miguel clung. A band was braying clamorously somewhere in the near distance. The cheers were rolling like thunder. Sunlight glinted on gold lace so dazzlingly that Miguel was perforce constrained to raise his eyes to that balcony whereon stood Maria Cervijas. At that precise moment temptation gripped the soul of Miguel Segunza. The story went that after passing this new law De Pedroba would definitely announce his forthcoming marriage to Maria. That meant that the road to her desirable heart was closed for everlasting to Miguel, third-class pilot. But if a bomb were thrown—if a bomb were thrown! Miguel turned away his gaze from the balcony as the devils tormented him. He saw the wide-hatted man lift his arm—saw it very clearly against the sun-parched woodwork of the door. Unquestionably it was a bomb. Why, he could see it—a black sphere—between the assassin's fingers. No others saw it; all were too intent on the splendid presence in the foremost carriage of the cortège.

Almost with one gesture Miguel Segunza whipped forth his knife and threw it. A single, horrified scream rang out above the roar of the mob and the clashing of the band. Certain of the spectators turned sharply to ascertain the reason for this unseemly outcry and saw a livid-faced man gnawing helplessly at a clipped moustache—a man, this, whose right hand was pinned by the wrist to the church door. So much they saw, and then only a blinding flash of light, followed by a stunning detonation as the bomb dropped from the paralysed fingers and burst on the step at the assassin's feet.

Never in all his days had Miguel, famous as a knife-thrower, thrown better. The fragments of the bomb-thrower mingled with the shattered fragments of the church door so closely as to be almost impossible of detection the one from the other.

"*Viv' el Presidente!*" shouted Miguel, who owned a notable voice within his distorted body. The cortège drove on as the *vigilantes* hastened through the shivering crowd to the spot where the explosion had occurred. None noticed Miguel as he slipped inconspicuously down from his lamp-post. None, that is, save one—a girl in white on a flower-decked balcony.

"Ah! he is always ready, that poor hunchback!" said Maria Cervijas.

Miguel's knife had saved Estrellia for a while; but for lack of evidence it was impossible for the Liberator to track down the originators of the attempted assassination. Miguel's knife had also saved De Pedroba to lead fair Maria Cervijas to the altar of the vast cathedrel in the splendour of marriage. Miguel attended the function, rending his heart with futile regrets. Had he not thrown his knife so surely——! And yet, as Maria passed down the aisle, leaning on her husband's arm, and, seeing the hunchback where he stood, wide-eyed and breathless, smiled, Miguel could not repent his intervention, for there was happiness in the bride's starry eyes, and on the Liberator's face a pride and glory that seemed to illumine the dark, thunderous coolness of the sacred building.

"It is the happiness of the woman one loves that counts," Miguel told himself stoutly. Maybe that determination showed in his face; something, at all events, compelled Señora De Pedroba to withdraw a rare flower from her

bouquet, touch it to her lips and then lay the bloom in Miguel's unsteady hand.

"But for him," she whispered to the Liberator, "this day had never dawned for us two, *querido*. First my brother, then thee—wherever I go it would seem Miguel must prepare the road of joy for me."

"His welfare shall be my chief care —next to thine, beloved," the Liberator said, who had embarked on the marriage venture with a desire to add to his power and who continued it out of sheer, overwhelming love.

Miguel left the church with the flower tenderly bestowed in safe keeping. He believed then that the cold, heavy feeling at the bottom of his heart would never lift; indeed, he spared a moment ere leaving the cathedral to kneel in the chapel of San' Miguel, his patron saint, and breathe a prayer for quick and merciful death; for life offered nothing of any particular worth, so far as he could understand. But, at a later hour, he took himself severely to task. Death was all very well, but how could a dead man continue to dream? True, he had dreamed crookedly aforetimes, which was unquestionably due to his general crookedness; but now he would rid his soul of foolish love-thoughts, which led only to torment of soul, and confine himself to those other, inspiring dreams of serving Estrellia, as De Pedroba had served his country.

"Miguel, *amigo*," he informed himself, "you have been a fool, and the father of all fools. None the less, persist a while in your foolishness. *She* is married to one who loves Estrellia, consequently she must love Estrellia. Therefore, you, too, must love the land—thus adding to her happiness."

One set of dreams being banished into the blackness of the impossible, it was necessary to resuscitate a fresh set of dreams. Once he had aspired to become such a Liberator as was De Pedroba. Poignantly he remembered the Liberator's appearance as he came proudly down the cathedral aisle with Maria on his arm: a tall, commanding man, as different from a warped and twisted third-class pilot as could well be imagined.

"Well, who knows, who knows?" he said. "Time will show!" Then he descended into the separate and appalling hells that are set apart for such as love vainly. Wild imaginings troubled that quick-working brain of his.

"It is not the man, it is the country!" he muttered. "But the good God only knows whither all this tangle leads." At the appointed time the good God was to show the intricacies of His planning.

Within the ensuing months certain things happened. Pressure of presidential influence promoted Miguel from third-class to second-class pilot—apparently the Liberator had not forgotten the promises made in the ecstasy of love. A short while afterwards, Sobrero, junior first-class pilot, missed the lower step of the ladder as he made to board the *Palgrave*, stopped in a choppy sea outside the harbour, and was crushed between the boat and the ship's side. That caused a vacancy, to which Miguel, distorted though he was, was appointed. Others grumbled at his promotion, until they remembered what he had done aforetimes. Then chance directed that the Liberator—returned from his honeymoon—should decide to visit outlying districts of his country, a country where, notwithstanding his wise ruling, internal communications were still indifferent. The presidential yacht was accordingly commissioned; and, strictly impartial—for rumours of discontent had penetrated the presidential palace's walls—De Pedroba decreed that the pilot next on the roster for duty should be appointed to control the yacht's destinies during the cruise. Miguel happened to be next on the roster. Maria De Pedroba greeted him with a very bright smile as he boarded the yacht, she extended a gracious hand. Happiness exuded from her, and Miguel decided that she was more beautiful than even his most flattering imaginings of her. Kissing her slim fingers he was aware of old emotions which he had definitely interred.

"Ah, my good Miguel!" Maria said in that voice which, to Miguel's fancy, was like the singing of birds in the first flush of dawn; "so we meet again? Now I feel safe, so that you, *amigo mio*, are in control."

"Harm can only reach you, Excellency, through my body," he told her. "Twisted though it be, it might serve as a barrier." He felt very proud as he directed the yacht's course out between the frowning cliffs that guarded the harbour. It was not given to him to own this radiant woman, but to him was allotted the task of safeguarding her through any maritime troubles that might arise.

Such troubles arose swiftly. There is a storm peculiar to Estrellia: an un-

heralded, devastating holocaust of the elements which is apt to try the fighting capacity of even the stoutest craft to its uttermost. Through the flurry that met the *Esperanza* almost as she passed between the guarding forts at the harbour mouth, Miguel humoured her adroitly.

"Leave her to me," he told the yacht's commander: "I know the trick of a ship."

The commander was howling frantic prayers to his particular saints, who appeared to be indifferent to his distress; he was a political sailor more than a practical one. During a clamorous night Miguel handled the *Esperanza* miraculously. One of the escorting destroyers sank in the flurry; and when the presidential yacht anchored in the harbour of Bahia Tinta most of the lost destroyer's crew were aboard her, saved by Miguel's promptitude and excellent seamanship. Miguel received a decoration for his services: a somewhat ornate cross of gold and enamel pinned on his breast by the Liberator himself; but its worth was lessened by the brightness of Maria's approving glance. Her brother chanced to be in command of the lost destroyer. None the less, the tour proved to be somewhat of a success. Miguel heard here and there of the favourable impression made by the President's wife. But he also heard, discreetly whispered in the privacy of waterside saloons, hints of discontent. It seemed that all Estrellia was not entirely satisfied with the Liberator. In outlying towns the Church party had considerable strength, and it was mentioned that De Pedroba was an obstacle. Under his governance the church threatened to languish in impotence. Sooner or later, however, something might be done to restore ancient powers.

Miguel piloted the *Esperanza* to her moorings at the termination of the cruise with a clear-cut impression in his mind. Sooner or later the rival faction would endeavour to pull De Pedroba down from his exalted place. Exactly how it would be done he did not know; but one thing was quite certain: it would happen soon. De Pedroba would fight; if the odds were too heavily against him, he would die. That would mean much pain to the heart of Maria De Pedroba.

"She must not suffer!" Miguel thought.

Yet it was so little that he could do to set matters right. With all the will in the world he was simply a nonentity: a voice crying in the wilderness.

When he did contrive to gain a hearing, louder-voiced men than himself would cry him down.

"Ah! listen—this hunchback talks—a tool of the President, look you! A first-class pilot at his age! One understands, no?" And derisive laughter would follow the statement.

"But what will you gain if the Liberator is deposed?" he asked, making grotesque gestures.

"Freedom; an increase in pay," came the answer. "This De Pedroba—he is undoubtedly employing the public moneys to support this doll-faced wife of his in luxury; and it is the toil of our hands that makes the money to buy her clothes."

"Not the toil of *thy* hands, Pablo, assuredly not that toil, for never have they done an honest day's work!" Miguel said; and his sally raised a bit of a laugh against the demagogue, for Pablo was notoriously a loafer, living on the bounty of such as he could impress with the glibness of his speech. Pablo's hand moved to the haft of his knife but halted midway by reason of the steely glitter in Miguel's eyes. The pilot might have risen to dignity in his trade, but he had by no means forgotten his trick of throwing a knife. And one did not wilfully annoy a man who could hurl eight inches of razor-sharp steel into his jugular with a mere hand twist.

"Well, those who live the longest will see the most," observed another of the café's patrons when the laughter subsided. "Men weary of tyranny, and there are golden promises going abroad."

After much listening to this sort of talk Miguel donned his best suit of clothing one day and betook himself to the presidential palace. A pilot's shore-going uniform lacked the splendour of the uniform of a battleship's captain, and fell very far short of the glory of the Liberator's full dress, but it convinced the sentries outside the palace gates, and Miguel was admitted.

"Well, what brings you here, *hombre?*" De Pedroba demanded laughingly. A big, brave man, conscious of his own rectitude and the purity of his motives, he could afford to be genial.

"It is these rumours that float about the city, Excellency," Miguel stammered, remembering his old-time dreams. Had he been straight and tall and splendid such dreams might reasonably have been fulfilled ere this. "There is talk going the rounds, and I thought it well to put you on your guard. Discontent and talk of a revolution."

Miguel the Liberator

De Pedroba shrugged his graceful shoulders, fingered his moustache. "That sort of talk has been common this many a year, Pilot Miguel," he said carelessly. "It is but the trickle of water that drips harmlessly on the rock."

"Excellency, I have seen rock—very hard rock—worn away by constant drippings," Miguel said earnestly. "I pray you have a care."

"Ah!" The President was impressed by that earnestness. "You seek to gain something by bringing this information." He was used to self-seekers, as any man in high office must ever be.

In the distance—it was a hot evening and the palace doors were thrown wide open to permit the entry of any whispering breeze that might chance to be astir—a woman's happy laughter sounded. Miguel's pulses drummed with more than wonted force in his temples.

"Nay, Excellency, I seek no advancement for myself. It is of Estrellia that I am thinking, of Estrellia and you. I pray you have a care; take precautions. There are certain hotheads, bribed by the discontented assuredly, who seek naught less than your death. If you die——"

"I shall not die—my power is founded in the hearts of the common folk," De Pedroba proudly returned. "Look about you—everywhere is prosperity. Before was nothing but misery and sorrow and suffering. The people remember."

"Some do; many forget. There is, moreover, Excellency, a new generation arising, who knew little of the poverty and sin and woe, and who grow discontented. And it is with this generation that the Church party play. They offer them not only wealth in this life, but also absolution in the life to come."

"Bah! the Church party. I count them of less worth than a fly!" laughed De Pedroba.

A beautiful face intruded itself into the room. Miguel caught his breath. Marriage, he realized, whilst setting Donna Maria far apart from him, had only added to her gracious loveliness. But a long mirror near at hand gave him a disconcerting reflection of his own twisted ugliness.

"Flies can feast on a corpse," he said. Then Maria, observing him, came forward smiling, extended a hand which he reverently kissed.

"Our good Miguel!" she said. "Sebastian, there is one, Senor Gremuda, seeks thee."

"Good; I will receive him." Miguel was not blind to the affectionate glance that passed between these two—the brightest stars in his own particular sky. What a fool and a child of folly he'd been to imagine for one moment that he might lift himself to such a giddy altitude!

"I will go, I will go!" he said hurriedly; but Maria stayed him.

"Nay," she said. "His Excellency has grave affairs of state to occupy him, but I—I am nothing. Come, Miguel, tell me of the ships and the bright waters beyond the bay." As De Pedroba took his departure she established Miguel in a small salon of her own, bidding an attendant bring wine and sweet cakes. She filled his glass with her own delicate hands, talked gaily of bygone times, and recreated all Miguel's oldest, wildest dreams. Before he realized it he was voicing certain of those most cherished fancies of his youth that now seemed so infinitely far away. Maybe Senora De Pedroba read more into the halting words than was actually spoken; maybe, being essentially a woman, she understood the reason for the tremulous unsteadiness of the pilot's voice.

"As I take it, Miguel," she said presently, "you love the Liberator."

"Ay, senora—he is my model of all a man should be. There was that day, long past, when he smiled at me and touched me in his splendour. One does not forget such moments until the years wither the memory, and even then one remembers. I had my fancies in those times, graciousness. I dreamed of the days to come when I might be as great as he. To serve Estrellia, to give her a greater freedom—ah! I forgot that I was but a twisted laughing-stock."

"It is the heart that counts, Miguel, not the body; and I have not forgotten that day when you threw the knife and saved his Excellency and Estrellia."

"Pooh, that was nothing! But I implore you, Excellencia, use your influence with him. I speak of the things whereof I know. There is an unrest that is growing. It is like the slow currents beneath the surface of the sea; a thing to be laughed at. But currents change and grow swift and drag the ships on to the rocks. To-day, might be, they are nothing; to-morrow—who knows?"

And yet, such being human nature, he was chiding himself for his earnestness in conveying the warning. For if De Pedroba refused to take precautions, if the impending sword did actually fall, it meant that Maria De Pedroba, the

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woman he loved with a devotion impossible of description in words, would be widowed and free—free!

Maria laid a hand on his hairy, ill-shaped hand. "We will guard him together, thou and I, Miguel my friend," she said softly. "For I think we both love him very dearly and count his safety of infinite worth."

Miguel left the presidential palace much as a man walking on resilient springs might have done. Ugly and deformed though he was, he shared a secret with Estrellia's most beautiful woman—that secret, the safeguarding of the Liberator. . . .

Thereafter he lost no opportunity of preaching his own particular gospel of faith in De Pedroba and his intentions, so that his associates laughed at him for a loose-brained enthusiast. But he talked—talked to the captains and officers of incoming steamers, on whose bridges he took up his position to con the vessels through the ever-altering dangers of the splendid harbour; and always his subject was the single-mindedness of the Liberator, his honest desire for his country's continued progress and well-being. Even to the captains of the great grey warships when they returned from deep-sea exercises he talked.

The captain of the *Minas Guerriras* laughed at his enthusiasm. This was an entirely different captain from the one who had ordered Miguel's return aboard after saving young Cervijas: a somewhat shifty-eyed man, concerning whom queer whispers were current in the mess-room of the pilot cutter, where men talked of men as they knew them in face of emergency.

"Eheu! this De Pedroba!" he scoffed. "All promises, scant fulfilments. It was the navy brought him into power, and what has he done for the navy? He has forgotten it. Can you point to a single naval officer holding position in his administration? Whereas, before his day, there were plums came our way—ripe plums. But he must have a care, this De Pedroba, for the navy that made him—Well, who knows?"

After that Miguel questioned other naval officers with whom his duties brought him into intimate touch. In the main they were indifferent to the actual form of government so long as they received their pay regularly—and none could grumble on account of postponements under the De Pedroba régime—and secured prolonged spells of shore-leave and adequate promotion. It was only here and there the hotheads followed the example of the *Minas Guerriras's* captain and growled against wrongs, real or imagined. But one and all definitely impressed upon the mind of Miguel the outstanding fact that on the navy depended the future welfare of Estrellia. The battleships, with their great guns, could destroy the city and its suburbs in an hour; there was no armament ashore competent to deal with them under any circumstances. The mere threat of the landward-turned guns was sufficient. De Pedroba had proved that in the bygone days; might be some other aspirant to power would prove it again.

Miguel gave a great deal of thought to this matter as time wore on. He pondered over the intricacies of the situation, putting his observations together with patient completeness. Estrellia was a good land, head and shoulders ahead of its neighbouring republics, thanks to De Pedroba's wise governance. But Miguel, himself an Estrellian, understood the Estrellian temperament that was not long content with circumstances and everlastingly fretting for change. Certain laws passed by De Pedroba caused dissatisfaction and formed handles for the Church party, who constantly worked in subtle, underhanded fashion to establish a government that would increase their secular powers. The Church party took full advantage of these opportunities, and propaganda work went steadily forward, not only in the city's slums, that De Pedroba was seeking to cleanse and obliterate, as it went forward in the army and the navy. Even the pilots were not immune from these whisperings; rich promises were made of increased pay and status and longer periods of shore-leave if only the pilots would throw in their lot with the clerical party. One advocate approached Miguel himself; and believing that he was winning to favour, spoke rare promises.

"Under a new regime it is more than possible that a man's physical disabilities would not disqualify him from appointment to high position," said this tempter. "There are those who have watched you, Senor Miguel; word has been passed concerning your frequent gallantry—which has not been sufficiently rewarded, eh? With another party in power there are more unlikely things than that you might be lifted from this bug-ridden cutter to the quarterdeck of the *Minas Guerriras*. It is the brains of a man that count, and

his fidelity to a cause, not his stature. Now it is known that you are brave, fearing naught. And what has your bravery profited you?"

It had profited him to the extent of bringing happiness to Donna Maria De Pedroba; and that in itself was sufficient reward for the Miguel who counted her happiness above all earthly rewards; but Miguel said nothing of that side of the matter.

"It might be—I make no promises—but it might be that when the moment comes to choose a new dictator, men might say: 'There is this Miguel; is he not worthy of consideration and advancement?'" tempted the clerical mischief-maker. For a moment Miguel was dazzled. One of his dreams had failed in fulfilment; but always at the back of his mind, even when disappointment was most acute, had survived that other dream, bred on a golden morning when the Liberator smiled at him across the waving heads of the throng, and, reaching over, patted his cheek.

"The country calls for a new liberator," said the coaxer, and, departing, left his venom to work its will with Miguel's soul. For many a day the first-class pilot trifled with the thought. Then, after surveying himself in the wavy mirror of his cabin, he boarded an incoming steamer, deftly moored her at her appointed wharf, and proceeded ashore to the palace, where he did not ask for the President, but for the President's wife.

"It is concerning our agreement," he said, wagging his forefinger in the air. "One makes a promise, Excellencia, and a promise is a sacred matter. Listen, there is mischief afoot."

"True, there is always mischief. What news have you, Miguel?" He supplied a comprehensive summary of all his recent observations. It amounted to a great deal, the way he put it. He added brick to brick until he had erected an imposing structure.

"They have offered to me the command of the *Minus Guerriras*," he stated. "Me, Miguel, the pilot! They have ventured to hint that I might aspire to the presidential chair."

Maria opened her beautiful eyes widely at that information. "After they have hung His Excellency," Miguel added, and saw her face writhe with horror. Miguel did not know what she knew: that a new life quickened within her; but he did know that his passion for her was a wasted thing.

"Picture," he said, again wagging his forefinger, "this good land under the clerical party once more! Excellencia, for God's love, warn him ere it be too late."

"Stay; I will bring him to you," said Maria De Pedroba; and left him to his own thoughts, which lacked in brightness. He had a sufficiency of time wherein to acclaim himself a fool of fools ere De Pedroba appeared.

"Assuredly, a fool," he told himself. "You heave overboard everything of value. You tear the fabric of your dreams apart with your own silly hands, imbecile! You who pictured the day when you should become such another liberator as this one—even a greater one!" But the conviction was borne in upon him that the happiness of the woman he loved depended entirely on De Pedroba's continuance in life and office. For Donna Maria also had her dreams of Estrellia's greatness.

"Ah, and what would you advise, Senor el Piloto?" the Liberator asked when the tale had been told for the second time. "Come, then—I have put the matter before my ministers, and they say this and they say that. Most of them are of opinion that it is best to let things go as they are going."

"Such as have been approached by the clerical party," grunted Miguel. "They have their agents everywhere, those shavelings, and their offers—Dios! Excellency, I advocate one thing. Dispatch the fleet on a long cruise; rid the harbour of the warships. Who'd keep a live bomb on his doorstep of choice? The navy is the key to the situation; I say it, who am of the sea. Bring in such of the up-country regiments of soldiers as are loyal, though God alone knows how far they have been tempted into rebellion at the appointed time! Then, with the navy absent, show a firm hand; arrest the leaders of the clerical party, thrust them out of the country. Readjust your appointments in the navy; establish therein the men you can trust to the hilt. It is no longer a time for half-measures. I say it; I who listen to the talk along the water-front."

"It is a matter worthy of consideration," De Pedroba said thoughtfully. "I will give it my earnest attention. Why do you trouble yourself to bring me such warnings, Senor Miguel?"

"Oh, even a twisted man might love Estrellia," Miguel said, his eyes engaging Maria's wide eyes so that a faint tinge of colour crept up under her skin. "And in my own twisted fashion I might think Estrellia is better under your ruling than under that of others."

"And, by way of reward, you seek——"

"Nothing that I am aware of. Your safety, as like as not, Excellency. Once on a time, long and long ago, you smiled at me and touched me in the flush of your splendour, and there are moments that even a hunchback remembers."

But Miguel knew, as Maria herself knew, that it was to save her heart a single unnecessary pang that he bore the warning. For women are very shrewd and know when men love them, even before the men know the fact for their own part.

"Well, here's a miracle, then," laughed the Liberator; "one who seeks no advancement for service rendered—here in Estrellia! Give him a glass of wine, Maria." And she did, with her own hands, smiling above the brim.

"To speak of advancement after that!" thought Miguel, all a-tremble as he left the palace.

His way led him down dark streets, wellnigh deserted at this hour of night, for he had purposely chosen a late hour. His hand slid to his terrible knife as his trained ears apprised him that he was being stealthily followed. A man came running of a sudden where the street was at its darkest, but by much staring through the blackest of stormy nights the pilot's eyes were trained into the semblance of a cat's.

"Halt, there!" Miguel snapped. A door opened suddenly, permitting a ray of light to shoot across the street. That stream of radiance disclosed a menace—a suddenly halted man with a revolver presented. Seeing a finger tighten on the trigger, Miguel launched his knife unerringly; it took the intending assassin very neatly in the throat and put an end to his enthusiasms for ever and a day. The bullet from the discharged pistol spatted harmlessly into the wall above Miguel's head; but it was only his quickness of hand and eye that had saved him. He recovered his knife from its temporary sheath without ostentation, and was off and away before the *vigilantes* arrived. In Estrellia it is as well to betray no particular interest in such dead bodies as may occasionally litter the streets; the arm of the law is prone to reach out and grasp the nearest spectator as the culprit responsible for death.

"So it moves already!" Miguel thought, wiping clean the blade of the friendly steel, when he had regained his modest shore-lodging. "To-day me—the spy; to-morrow, His Excellency, as like as not! Ay, ay, it moves." And he wondered whether he had not been a fool to attempt to fling a bar into the medley of wheels that made up the politics of Estrellia.

He was, however, glad to notice that De Pedroba had taken his advice to the extent of ordering the fleet to sea. Miguel himself acted as pilot to the *Minas Guerriras* as she picked her careful way down the harbour. Behind her came the other ships—ludicrously inefficient according to Northern standards, amazingly menacing to the welfare of Estrellia; for though their semi-obsolete guns might not engage a hostile fleet with any hope of success, they were quite sufficient to batter the city to rubble, and to dominate all roads by which reinforcements might be hurried citywards in case of need.

Miguel had expected to hear expressions of chagrin from the officers, but the captain of the great battleship seemed to be in rare good humour.

"Those laugh longest who laugh last," he said, rubbing lemon-coloured hands together. "One sees what is in De Pedroba's mind. He is afraid of *us*. Good; we know where we stand. Maybe his fears are well-grounded. Why that alteration of course, pilot?"

"There is a new obstruction," Miguel replied evenly. "Did you not feel the slight earthquake shock night before last? It has altered to some extent the harbour bottom; and there is a small rock—very small, Senor Capitan, but sufficient to rip your bottom plates into nothingness."

"It is not marked on the charts," the captain grumbled.

"With these quick changes it is not always possible to advise those ashore," Miguel replied. "That is why we pilots exist."

"It would appear you know the harbour bottom as a man knows the palm of his own hand, then?"

"It is my business so to know it, senor. So; we are clear of the obstruction, and by opening on the lighthouse on Fort Guayara, there is a straight road to open water."

Miguel breathed a sigh of relief when he descended the sheer side of the great battleship into the tossing boat that was tender to the pilot-cutter. With the fleet securely at sea, the city might rest in peace. Unquestionably the Liberator had taken his advice and cunningly drawn the most formidable of the clerical party's teeth. The warships promised to be absent on a prolonged

cruise, visiting far-distant ports. There was a breathing space wherein De Pedroba might alter his policy without fear of opposition.

Miguel rubbed his hands as the boat headed towards a halted liner bound for the harbour. For the moment he forgot to regret that he was not in command of the *Minas Guerriras*, as might have been the case had his body been straight.

He boarded the incoming liner in obedience to her signal for a pilot, and mounted to her bridge, to be welcomed by her captain: a bright-eyed and capable Briton, who ignored Miguel's deformity and treated him with excellent courtesy.

"Well, pilot, what sort of government have you got here now?" Captain Anstruther asked laughingly.

"The same as before, my captain; the best."

"I thought there might have been a change. They've shot their president up in Ugalya. There's heavy fighting going on up there at this present moment; all South America appears to be in a regular ferment. A good man, too, President Elezana; a darn sight better than the country deserves, if you ask me anything. I didn't know but what Estrellia might have caught the infection." Miguel gave a laughing answer, then stiffened.

"That one there, now?" he asked with forced casualness, jerking his chin towards a passenger who leaned over the rails of the promenade; "that one, who might he be?"

"Nay, I don't know; we picked him up at Ugalya; he says he's a refugee." Miguel's immediate impulse was to hurl his knife into the back of the passenger, for he recognized him as a dangerous firebrand and a mouthpiece of the wildest section of the clerical party. His presence in Estrellia boded no good to the country, coming, as it did, on top of recent rumours. The clerical party were intent on making a definite bid for power against the progressives.

But Miguel's knife remained harmlessly in its sheath. He understood the law fairly well, especially the law as applied aboard British ships, where killing was apt to be counted a heinous offence. Did he hurl his knife and hit the target, as he could not fail to hit it, he would promptly be overpowered and placed in irons; later he would be incarcerated in the city prison for an indefinite period. He felt that he might be of more use to Estrellia free than bond. So he restrained the impulse to rid the world of that noxiousness that was aboard the liner for no good purpose, and answered the British captain's chaff good-naturedly, inwardly resolving to keep his weather eye watchfully lifting.

He piloted the ship to her moorings with his accustomed dexterity, thereby earning the captain's encomiums. "The trickiest harbour I've got to enter," Captain Anstruther stated. "Charts don't seem to be of any use hereabouts. They're out of date as soon as they're issued. Don't you ever make a mistake, pilot?"

"I have made none so far," laughed Miguel, watching the noxious passenger make his preparations to leave the ship. He had a feeling, which he vainly endeavoured to dissipate, that the arrival of this man menaced the peace of Estrellia. It was a ridiculous feeling of course—what harm could happen now that the fleet had gone to sea? But it was there. So pronounced was his feeling that, as soon as opportunity offered, he presented himself again at the presidential palace, and, on being admitted to De Pedroba's presence, voiced his apprehensions. De Pedroba laughed.

"What can one man do, *hombre?*" he demanded.

"Much, Excellency! I am afraid. I do not know why, but I am. And they have shot the President of Ugalya. Excellency, I beseech you, order the arrest of all suspects ere it be too late!"

"And thus precipitate calamity? No, no, my friend. Listen to me: the city is like a powder magazine, needing but a single spark to set it alight, and then—think of the innocent blood that must be shed. Alone, this man can do no harm; with the fleet absent, I possess the key to the situation."

Miguel found it necessary to be content with this assertion, though he remained still vaguely dissatisfied. To his mind it was as though an electrical unrest troubled the city that was the heart of Estrellia. As he left the palace, aware of acute disappointment in that he had not been permitted to set eyes upon Donna Maria, the impression of impending disaster grew more and more pronounced. De Pedroba himself was agitated, though for private reasons. Maria was approaching the hour of her travail; and he loved her so that even the ultimate welfare of Estrellia appeared to be of small account meantime. For the hands that had wrapped themselves about the heart-strings of Miguel the

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pilot had taken no less firm a grasp of the core of De Pedroba's soul.

Always dissatisfied, Miguel turned into a café that was his customary place of call. Here, too, he grew conscious of that suggestion of unrest; men whispered together in corners with covert glances over their shoulders. One man spoke loudly, in a boastful voice, of imminent changes, and mentioned the recent fate of President Elezana.

"Things move," he said. "They are an enlightened crowd up there in Ugalya. Well, the enlightenment is due to reach us here. One knows what one knows."

"Sh!" whispered a companion; "this hunchback listens, and he is the President's own man. Have a care, Sancho." But the man had been drinking and was not overly disposed to be careful.

"He, too, will cease to be," he boasted. "Here's to the coming freedom!" He raised his glass to his lips with an unsteady hand, but ere he could taste the potent brewage therein the vessel was struck from his hand by Miguel's cunningly-hurled knife. In passing, the blade neatly removed the tip of the fellow's nose, deluging his mouth and chin with blood. Whilst he gasped and bubbled, Miguel quietly retrieved the knife that might as readily have split the man's head in twain. None molested him, well knowing his terrible skill.

"Now," said he, holding the steel ready, "let's have the truth of this matter."

"Ohé, it's naught; he's a wide-mouthed braggart, this Sancho," said an acquaintance. "He takes too much wine and talks like the fool he is." Miguel knew this apologist lie.

"So the new revolution draws near!" he said. "Fools, fools! All fools together! Can you forget what the Liberator has done for Estrellia?"

"Ay, ay; but it is not enough. And there are others who promise more. We must move with the times, we of the under-class." He babbled forth a torrent of tub-thumping rhetoric that betrayed careful tuition. A dangerous man this, for he magnified trivial grievances into enormous proportions. The clients of the café nodded and bridled as he drove his points home. He seemed to preach a gospel of much money and no work.

"Of what use is money unless it is earned?" interpolated Miguel. "And the less work a man does, the more money he spends, having naught else to occupy his time. Work, my friends—that is the secret! Better to work hard for a peso a day than idle on two pesos a day. The wage has more worth when the hours for spending it are fewer. As witness our rich men here in Estrellia, who spend freely to save themselves from *ennui*." But the doctrine of high pay for little work fascinated the hearers, and Miguel's statement was received with but scant sympathy. Miguel got to his feet after a while, his hand on his knife-haft, and left the café.

"He is a dreamer, that one," said Sancho; "a dreamer and a fool!" Loud, raw laughter followed Miguel into the gloom of the street. And as he hobbled along, temptation gripped him fiercely once more. It would be so easy, so startlingly easy, to throw in his lot with the party of discontent. If De Pedroba were hanged from the presidential flagstaff a clear road would inevitably be opened to Maria's heart. He grappled with the insidious enemy and won. Instead of returning to the pilot's hostel he once more betook himself to the palace.

"At the least," he said to De Pedroba, "send Her Excellency into the country, where she will be safe. I have many fears, Excellency. I have listened to the talk."

"That is impossible. To move her now might spell the letters of her death," the Liberator said. And then, in agony of soul, he spoke to twisted Miguel as man speaks to man in the confidential hours.

"It may be at any time, so the doctors tell me," he stated.

"It could be arranged, Excellency—with great care."

"No, no; it is impossible. Look you, Miguel. Regard the situation. She knows—the nurses have chattered after their fashion—that trouble broods. She fears for me. Out of the city her fears would grow. Maybe she dies, and with her the child. And we have no proof that this unrest will boil up into a regular trouble. I have taken precautions."

"There is something pending, something very terrible!" Miguel said in reply. "I know what I know. I may be a hunchback, Excellency, but I *know!* How the blow will fall I cannot tell, but a blow impends."

He spoke for twenty minutes, recounting his observations so impressively that De Pedroba was lifted out of his purely paternal agitation into an even greater agitation. But he shrugged his shoulders when the telling was done.

"Without the fleet nothing can be

done," he said. "And the warships are safely away on deep water. I have reliable troops in the city; my own guard is loyal. A show of force now—a few priests put into gaol—that will suffice."

But Miguel was not yet content. Once again he urged on De Pedroba the advisability of transferring Maria, sufferer though she might be, into the safer solitudes of the country. He left the palace under a cloud of disappointment.

"Maybe I see trouble where trouble is not," he told himself. "But if it is coming it will be soon." He knew his countrymen's temperaments more than passing well; he knew how swiftly the hot Southern blood boils up to fever heat. Many a revolution has been planned and carried into successful execution by reason of an unaccustomed night of stifling heat. Human tempers are apt to fray at the edges when the weather conditions are phenomenal. And this night was a night of brooding sultriness. His strong impulse was to remain on hand, in the vicinity of the palace, where might be his trick of throwing a knife would serve the Liberator in a moment of emergency. But custom took him down to the pilot's hostel near the harbour. On the way he passed many stealthy groups of men who muttered together in secret with glances over their shoulders. Once, when the familiar sound of his uneven gait reached the ears of one such group, filthy matters and even more filthy words were flung to his address. Of a certainty things were not shaping well in the city.

Once he was tripped up and flung, sprawling, into the kennel; greater violence might have been done him but that he reared himself awkwardly upright and cried: "Well, come on, then—it is only Miguel the Hunchback—Miguel the knife-thrower!" And it is conceivable that every man of the pack felt the sting of steel in throat or breast in anticipation. At all events, Miguel was permitted to hobble towards the harbour without further attack.

"Ah, the Senor Miguel!" said the retired *corregidor* of the pilot cutter who presided over the hostel. "That is good. There is a call for you. The launch waits at the stairs: it has waited some hours. An accident aboard the cutter, look you: the small boat was crushed when returning alongside. Senor Calgunas has a broken thigh, no less, and is already in hospital; and Senor Altamayo suffers a broken chest. And many large steamers are expected."

Since, under De Pedroba's wise administration, the traffic of the port had trebled itself, the sailing cutter which housed the pilots and cruised steadily off the harbour mouth had been furnished with a small but speedy motor launch in order that effective communication with the shore might be maintained. There was talk, too, of abolishing the antiquated cutter and replacing her with a powerful motor-craft that should stand as the last word in efficiency. But as yet the motor-vessel was in the air, and the old bug-ridden cutter held the station.

"The *Severn*, the *Quericas* and the *Santissima Maria* are all due within a dozen hours, yes," agreed Miguel, "Very well; I go." There was really nothing else to be done; revolution or no revolution, incoming ships must be tended; and, after dawn, outward ships must be conducted to the safety of the open water beyond the harbour mouth. With two first-class pilots out of action it was imperative that Miguel should return immediately to his duty.

He took the helm of the launch himself as she thudded out across the star-spangled floor of the harbour. None knew the short cuts and hazards better than himself, who had made a cunning study of the pilot's craft, urged thereto by that vague ambition of his which should lead him ultimately—so he would have it—to the presidential chair or the side of Maria Cervijas. Old, foolish dreams, as futile as dreams ever were! It was not for him to stand between the country he loved and misfortune; not for him to win to the heart of beautiful Maria, already in her agony. He was simply a twisted *peon*, an uncounted atom in the great scheme of government. He had done what he could, and his efforts, he told himself, had been futile. It called for a tall, straight man, a big, handsome man, to cope with genuine trouble when such trouble came along. Such a man, for instance, as De Pedroba, who had brought showers of blessings on Estrellia. Assuredly a warped and twisted hunchback could do naught to bring about peace and harmony amongst the warring elements that made up the populace.

"I have failed in my dreams!" muttered Miguel sadly, and for a moment or two the tiller of the launch swung idly as he covered his working face with his hands. He had nothing to recommend him to public favour: a trick of swimming—once he had built great

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castles in the air on the foundations of his ability to swim like a seal—a trick of throwing a knife—any *peon* could do that; but how could the toss of eight inches of steel benefit Estrellia or—Maria De Pedroba? What it all amounted to was that he, dreamer of dreams—he, who had seen himself such a liberator as De Pedroba, was merely a hated spy, carrying reports to the palace.

"There is the cutter, senor," said the *padrone* of the motor launch, pointing. Miguel came back to realities and brought the launch alongside the cutter with customary adroitness. Treading the cutter's deck, he felt his tottering manhood return to him. Ashore he was simply a thing to be pitied or a laughing-stock, depending upon his immediate associates. Afloat, he was different. There was a chop running, the cutter threw herself about violently; but Miguel was indifferent to her gyrations. He balanced himself easily as he talked with the cutter's skipper. And whilst he talked a signal rocket flared up towards the star-flecked sky. Another rocket followed it, bursting into red, white and green stars.

"Ah, the *Severn,* running accurately to her timing," said the pilot cutter's skipper. He instructed a deckhand to arouse Pilot Zebusto, who was next on the roster for duty. Zebusto turned out, grumbling savagely, dropped into the whaler which had replaced the crushed gig, departed, a slave to duty. Conducting the famous British liner to her moorings meant much money.

There would probably be bets amongst the passengers, too, as to which leg the pilot would throw over the rail first; and the winners of the bets would show grateful. Zebusto was not to be pitied.

"He is the lucky one, Zebusto," the cutter's skipper mentioned. "Maybe the next-comer will be a tramp, flying light." Pilotage was charged according to a vessel's draught. The deeper a ship swam, the larger the dues, and the greater the commission paid to her pilot.

An hour later—Miguel discovered it impossible to sleep, and paced the deck awkwardly in company with the cutter's skipper—a blue light flared, and on either side of it showed red and green lights burning steadily.

"The *Santissima Maria*—ahead of her time," the skipper said. "Senor Da Costa takes the duty." He sent below to arouse the sleeping pilot, who also departed. Another hour went by after the boat had returned to the parent cutter. Miguel was just turning to go below when the signal flared.

"Your turn, Senor Miguel. It is a ship of the navy demanding a first-class pilot," the skipper said.

That flaring signal seemed to supply a definite answer to all Miguel's earlier doubts. Under the temporary glare he saw the outline of a great ship—not merely a cruising destroyer. He laughed quietly to himself. One might have known that something of this kind was in the wind. The elation of the *Minas Guerriras's* captain was immediately accounted for.

"Send for my bag," Miguel commanded, "and get the boat alongside." The pilot cutter was burning her flare to indicate that the signal had been seen and understood. Behind the foremost ship that had signalled was a suggestion of other lean hulls, lightless and sinister.

Miguel awkwardly scrambled down the rope ladder into the bobbing boat, took the tiller as it was pushed off, and steered an unerring course across the dancing waves. The nearer he drew to the signalling ship the clearer he realized her significance. She was without a shadow of a doubt the *Minas Guerriras*, supposed to be far afield on an appointed cruise.

"So; in bow, and rowed of all," Miguel said calmly. The bowman of the pilot boat caught the line that was thrown, the boat itself swung down to the lowered ladder, Miguel scrambled aboard.

"We looked for Calgunas," rasped an unpleasant voice. "Ho! cover him, *hombres!*" In the feeble glimmer of a hand-lantern Miguel grew aware of many rifles pointing himward.

"Calgunas has broken a leg," he declared airily. "The turn falls to me, captain."

"Ah, well, it matters little. Look you, pilot; you will conduct this ship to a position in the harbour where her guns command the city, eh?"

"Assuredly, my captain. And the other ships?"

"They follow our lead. Let me mention that death is the reward of treachery." Something hard and round was pressed against Miguel's middle there in the darkness. He recognized it for the muzzle of an extremely weighty automatic pistol.

With the pistol muzzle still pressed against his middle part, Miguel was conducted to the navigating bridge. The *Minas Guerriras,* emblem of power, lay

motionless, with stopped engines, outside the harbour mouth. Between his gun muzzles and the city was a stretch of intricate water extending, maybe, a dozen miles. Miguel knew that stretch of water better than any one of all the Estrellian pilots.

"Take her into safe anchorage," ordered the captain, and rang the engines to half-speed ahead.

"Steer North 18 West," said Miguel. He was quick-witted. A single glance about had shown him the precise position. In rear of the great battleship were the other ships of the fleet—returning against instructions. Only one purpose could lead them into harbour. He saw the faint flickering of a signal torch, saw it answered curtly from the ship next astern.

"Had it not been for the awkwardness of the channel I had refused to signal for a pilot," mentioned the captain.

"Ah! The channel is awkward; it has altered within these last few hours," Miguel answered. He stared aft, mentioning the need to keep the light on the buoy on a certain bearing, and saw the shadowy hulls of the following vessels swing orderly into line.

"And I shall not hesitate to shoot, *amigo*, if there is a single hint of treachery."

Miguel thought of very many things as the *Minas Guerriras* steamed majestically towards the harbour entrance. A sensational coup was indicated. Dawn must find the city held helpless under the menace of the guns of the fleet—that fleet that had been suborned by the clerical party. There would be an ultimatum. De Pedroba would swing from his own flagstaff, as other presidents had swung. Not that Miguel cared much for the ultimate fate of the Liberator. He was a high-souled and splendid man, but he had robbed him of the woman of his heart.

"Fool!" he muttered through bitten lips; "she would never have loved thee, a twisted abomination!"

Quite suddenly he saw a light, he remembered childhood's fancies when he dreamed of becoming such a figure as was De Pedroba, the Liberator. Also he remembered that this was the night of Maria's travail, when a single untoward happening might rid her of life.

He wiped a smear of dew from the glass of the binnacle-hood, complaining of the indistinctness of the compass-card. The battleship's captain did not know that the same gesture had brought the haft of Miguel's terrible knife conveniently to his hand, or that the blade was now so placed that a single movement would launch it.

"There will be alterations," the captain bragged, always fingering the automatic's trigger. "It is whispered that I might be the next president, pilot—I! I shall know where to bestow rewards at the appointed time. Ohé! it is very simple. That De Pedroba now: he counts himself on a level with the gods. He forgets that the fleet that made him can destroy him. Once let the city know the menace of our guns and then—ohé!"

"Remember me, captain, when you come into your great inheritance," said Miguel with a laugh that to himself sounded false.

He was still writhen by temptation. If the coup succeeded De Pedroba would die and consequently leave Maria a widow. Excitement might kill the expectant mother, but—women survived much suffering. If he, Miguel, aided this new revolutionary party, his services would be remembered; it was on the cards he might rise to high office.

But—there were obstacles. He still loved Maria De Pedroba; but he knew that her unrestrained love was given to her lawful mate. The *Minas Guerriras* passed through the harbour entrance, between the sleeping forts. The night had closed in velvety black, and beyond the faint glow on the battleship's creamy wake and the phosphorescent sheen of the bow wave of the next ship in line, was nothing to indicate that stealthy approach. Miguel realized that he, the hunchback, held Estrellia's destinies between his two big, misshapen hands. Everything depended upon the fleet; the whole fleet depended on his guidance.

"Steer North 27 West," he ordered, glancing astern and to either beam. The order was communicated to the helmsman in a whisper. But, staring into the faintly illuminated binnacle, Miguel the pilot saw nothing of the swinging compass-card; instead he saw the face of Maria De Pedroba, the woman he loved, and to his distorted fancy it seemed as if that face were illumined by a new and amazing glow. It required but a scant exercise of the imagination to picture her with a child in her arms. But if the battleships reached their positions and trained their gun muzzles on the city, that child might never be born.

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"Here," said Miguel, licking lips that had become curiously dry and hot, "we alter course again. There is a sandbank—call the soundings!" The leadsman near at hand hove his lead and hoarsely whispered the result—Mark ten.

"Port twenty degrees! Signal the following ships to turn," said Miguel. "Full speed here, my captain—the tide ebbs swiftly." He heard the sharp ringing of bells in the engine-rooms, felt the deck beneath his feet quiver to the quickening of the engines. The *Minas Guerriras* seemed to hurl herself hungrily forward like a hound approaching the moment of the kill. The signalling torch communicated the intelligence to the next ship in line. Miguel waited, breathing a thought stertorously through his nostrils. He knew every detail of the harbour's bottom; he seemed to see it spread out under his eyes.

"No treachery!" the captain threatened.

"One does not betray with death so close at hand," said Miguel. He was waiting, waiting and counting. There were four ships astern, and a single one might mean the downfall of De Pedroba. The blare of a single gun might mean the death of Maria. But to his port hand was a reef of ragged rocks.

"Hard a-starboard!" he said. The *Minas Guerriras* ran harshly on the sharp-fanged reef and tore her bottom out. It was done very swiftly. The great ship seemed to recoil ere she plunged wildly forward again. Then she listed heavily. Her starboard guns pointed to the harbour bottom, her port guns to the stars. As a fighting weapon she was of less account than a child's pop-gun. But, ere she settled, her next astern crashed into her, and, following, the third in line crashed into the second. The shock of the impact threw Miguel down, but the captain's pistol cracked ere he reached the deck.

"So—traitor!" hissed the would-be President of Estrellia. Miguel was aware of a dull pain in his abdomen, was aware of gushing blood. Yet he was strangely happy. As lights were flashed on he saw the writhen face of the *Minas Guerriras's* captain.

"Nay; patriot!" Miguel gasped, his hand dropping to his terrible knife. There was just enough light in his dimming eyes to distinguish the pallid oval of the would-be President's face. Miguel threw the knife with excellent aim.

Such as had time to listen heard him suddenly cry: "Ah, Maria, behold me; I am straight and tall and handsome! *Viv' Estrellia—Viv' el Liberador!*" But Miguel the Liberator was dead almost as the cry left his lips, hardly knowing that he had saved his country. And ashore the clerical party, armed to the teeth, awaited the appointed signal—the boom of the *Minas Guerriras's* turret guns—and awaited it in vain.

HERBERT GALE.

£250 PRIZE WON!

RESULT OF "TRAVEL" COMPETITION

This contest appeared in "The Story-Teller," "Cassell's Magazine," "The Quiver," "The New Magazine," "Little Folks," "The Corner Magazine," "T.P.'s & Cassell's Weekly," "Chums," and the "P.M."

The correct names of the places shown in the twenty photographs were as follow:

1. **Harrogate.**
2. **Lincoln.**
3. **Lowestoft.**
4. **Peterborough.**
5. **Fountains Abbey.**
6. **York.**
7. **Edinburgh.**
8. **Bridlington.**
9. **Whitby.**
10. **Felixstowe.**
11. **Southend-on-Sea.**
12. **Aysgarth Falls.**
13. **Ripon.**
14. **Coltishall Lock.**
15. **Cauldron Snout.**
16. **High Forse, Teesdale.**
17. **North Berwick.**
18. **Rievaulx Abbey.**
19. **Scarborough, North Side.**
20. **Knaresborough.**

Absolutely correct lists were received from 205 competitors, and the Prize of £250 has therefore to be divided amongst the senders. Space will not permit the printing of the names and addresses of the winners, but a full list will be posted to any competitor forwarding a stamped addressed envelope to "Travel," The Competition Editor, Messrs. Cassell & Co., Ltd., La Belle Sauvage, E.C.4.

PRIZES WILL BE FORWARDED IN DUE COURSE

Some New Books

¶ If anyone is qualified to tell "The Story of Broadcasting" and the wonderful mysteries of wireless progress, it is Mr. A. R. Burrows, the familiar "Uncle Arthur" of listeners-in. The outstanding feature of this remarkably interesting book is that it gives just that information which hundreds of thousands are seeking to-day, and gives it in such simple language and such homely parallels that it is not only easily understood, but it is made as interesting as a work of fiction. There are many peeps behind the scenes, interesting sidelights on the complex task of preparing the ever-changing material, and some startling speculations upon the future.

¶ Anything that comes from the pen of Baroness Orczy is bound to have a good reception, and when it is another Pimpernel story, its success is assured. The Pimpernel in "Pimpernel and Rosemary" is Peter Blakeney, a direct descendant of the original Sir Percy, and the scenes are divided between London and the Balkan States in the period after the Great War. Most of the plot is woven around the heroine, Rosemary, an English girl of culture with a journalistic bent. Throughout the narrative is a stirring love interest. Those who love a thoroughly exciting story of Greek meeting Greek, which is full of vigour and thrill, yet wholesomely breezy, will revel in the resourceful and dramatic adventures of this latest Pimpernel

¶ A wonderful yellow frock of charmeuse, instead of a more staid garment ordered by the artist's wife, brought romance into a Kentish village home after a married life of twenty years, and with the aid of a young naval officer effected a revolution in the lives of the family. In "Charmeuse," E. Temple Thurston's latest novel, we are introduced to the Campion family, tailor Hinds, Miss Limpett, who was not afraid of burglars, Wilfred, the blameless and unlucky, and many other neighbours who take part in the strange and exciting adventures that followed the arrival of the charmeuse dress. There is a vein of pleasant humour running through this charming love story that is characteristic of this popular writer.

¶ One of the new season's books that will be most read and discussed is Miss Radclyffe Hall's "The Unlit Lamp." It is a "brilliant" novel, incisive, almost pitiless in its analysis of feminine characteristics. It is a story of women, their strength and power of sacrifice—their weakness and their foibles. They are types to be met with in every circle, and readers will feel that each one is known to themselves and recognize the artistry exercised in the presentation of their characters.